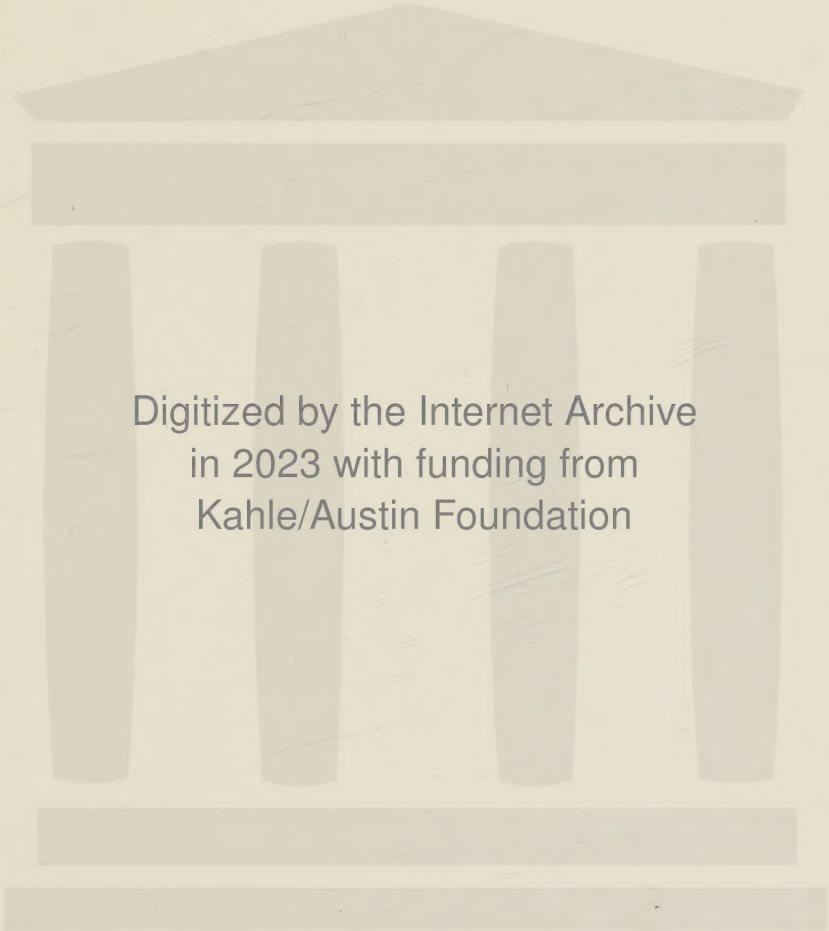
Robert Burns and the Medical Profession.



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DR. JOHN MACKENZIE

By William Findlay, after an Oil Painting, by James Tannock, at present in the possession of the Misses Mackenzie, Edinburgh.

Robert Burns

and

The Medical Profession

BY

WILLIAM FINDLAY, M.D.

("GEORGE UMBER")

AUTHOR OF "IN MY CITY GARDEN" AND "AYRSHIRE IDYLLS"

WITH THIRTEEN FULL-PAGE PORTRAITS

ALEXANDER GARDNER

Publisher to Her Majesty the Queen

PAISLEY; and PATERNOSTER SQUARE, LONDON

1898

PREFACE.

I was asked, some time ago, at a Burns Anniversary Celebration, to reply to the toast of the Medical Profession; and in casting about in my mind what to say in justification of the honour, it occurred to me that the name of the Bard was associated with the medical faculty in a much more intimate manner than at first sight appeared, or was even generally understood; and that it was, therefore, a not inappropriate toast to be proposed at a gathering of Burns admirers.

Afterwards, pursuing the same train of thought, and going deeper into the subject, I soon became convinced of the accuracy of my conjecture—that, indeed, the field, if somewhat circumscribed, was so rich in materials and interest, that justice could not be done to it within the prescribed limits assigned either to an after-dinner toast or in a reply to the same. A lecture, or even a book, as the matter grew under my hand, seemed the likelier and the truer destination to which its dimensions should reach. This solution of the business, I may say, became still more apparent as I proceeded on my way, and came to tackle those controversial points which have, more particularly of late years, gathered around Dr. Currie's biographical achievement; and which have so long, and, I venture to think, so harmfully, in-

volved the good name of the Poet. Such an unfortunate effect, moreover, has been mainly brought about by virtue of the biographer's very conscientiousness (over-righteousness) in discharging the duty which he considered he owed to the memory of his subject, to the public, and to himself; conferring, thereby, a sort of classicism on his pronouncement of Burns's errors and characterisation, which, from the warmth of approval with which the doctor's judgment had been quoted by so many distinguished authorities and from so many different quarters, came to be looked upon as possessing the stamp of finality, and, therefore, endowed with a correspondingly long lease of life.

In the execution of my task, the materials for which are, in many instances, difficult to find, and not always accessible, I have tried to state the case temperately and fairly for all concerned. How far I have succeeded, the reader must be the judge.

That these pages are a perfect or complete statement of the inquiry, *Robert Burns and the Medical Profession*, I do not for a moment contend. In my researches amid Burns bibliographies, library catalogues, and other dry-as-dust out-of-the-way nooks and corners of book-shelves, it is probable that I have missed out some contribution; but the statement is as complete as, with care and labour, I have been able to make it.

I have to acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. Alexander Patterson, Glasgow, for his kindness in allowing me free

access to his extensive and most valuable Burnsiana library; and to Dr. James Finlayson, Hon. Librarian to the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow, for many important bibliographical notes bearing on the subject of my inquiry. I have also to thank Mr. F. T. Barrett and his assistants, of the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, Mr. D. M'Naught, the distinguished editor of the *Annual Burns Chronicle*, Dr. H. Vevers of Hereford, Mr. James Smith, Raemoir, Ayr, Mr. Alexander Anderson of the Edinburgh University Library, Messrs. Thomas Rennie and William Reid, Glasgow, Mr. James Carment, Dumfries, and others, for their obliging help and assistance in furnishing me with numerous hints and points of information, or otherwise aiding me towards the successful completion of my task. I have likewise to express my acknowledgments to Col. J. Maxwell Witham, Kirkconnell, Newabbey, Dumfriesshire, for kindly permitting me to photograph the oil painting, in his possession, of his celebrated relative, the late Dr. William Maxwell, Dumfries; and to John Mackenzie, Esq., W.S., Edinburgh, for furnishing me with a photograph of his grandfather, the late Dr. John Mackenzie of Mauchline, from which the drawing for the present work was made.

WILLIAM FINDLAY.

FERN VILLA,
DENNISTOUN,
GLASGOW,
OCTOBER, 1898.

CONTENTS.

		PAGE
I.	Dr. John Mackenzie, Mauchline, ...	9
II.	Drs. Gregory, Wood, Adair, etc., Edinburgh, ..	22
III.	Dr. John Moore, London, ...	35
IV.	Drs. Maxwell, Thomson, Mundell, etc., Dumfries, ...	57
V.	James Currie, M.D., F.R.S., Liverpool, . ..	69
VI.	Dr. David Macbeth Moir (Delta), and the Grand Alloway Festival, ...	91
VII.	Drs. Fr. Adams, O. W. Holmes, etc., ...	100
VIII.	Dr. John Brown and Others down to the end of the Eighties, ...	111
IX.	A Decade of Medical Burnsites, including Dr. James Adams, Glasgow, ...	124

Appendix—
Sources of Information for this Inquiry, .. 135

Index, ... 143

Subscribers' Names, ... 151

LIST OF PORTRAITS.

DR. JOHN MACKENZIE, ... *Frontispiece.*

PROFESSOR JAMES GREGORY, M.D., ... *to face page* 22

DR. ALEXANDER WOOD, ... „ 28

DR. JOHN MOORE, ... „ 35

„ „ .. .. „ 42

DR. WILLIAM MAXWELL, ... „ 51

JAMES CURRIE, M.D., F.R.S., ... „ 69

„ „ „ .. .. „ 88

DAVID MACBETH MOIR, M.D. (DELTA), ... „ 91

FRANCIS ADAMS, M.D., LL.D., ... „ 103

DR. OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES, ... „ 107

DR. JOHN BROWN, ... „ 111

JAMES ADAMS, M.D., F.F.P.S.G., ... „ 124

Robert Burns and the Medical Profession.

I.

Dr. JOHN MACKENZIE, MAUCHLINE.

The association of the name of Burns, particularly in his lifetime, with the learned professions is matter of commonest familiarity to the most ordinary reader of his works. In his confession,

> "I've been at drunken writers' feasts,
> Nay, been bitch-fou 'mang godly priests,"

he has focused for us, in his own pithy style, the close and bibulous character of that communion; though he, doubtless, intended us to receive the declaration with a pinch of salt—to take from the lines the usual liberal discount accorded to the man of humour, who is generally also a man of exaggeration.

It might have been better for Burns, especially in the beginning of his poetical career, while farming at Mossgeil with his brother Gilbert, had he been less intimate with lawyers and new-licht ministers, all of whom, Carlyle declared, would require to be sleeping in their graves before

the world would be able to see their quondam champion and boon-companion aright. It is questionable if their society did the Poet any good; the probability rather is that it did him harm; and it was certainly owing to his friendliness with the new-lichts, together with the fact that he was their daringly clever and candid mouthpiece and most brilliant fighting man, that the auld-licht party, not only in his lifetime, but long after his death, was so bitterly hostile to him.

If his relationship to the most rigidly orthodox section of the clergy was, in those days, marked by scathing satire on his side, and by hatred and denunciation of his character and poetry on theirs, continued down to our own time by the narrower and more intolerant descendants of the auld-lichts, no such dishonourable wordy-warfare and slander distinguishes his intercourse with the medical faculty, with whom he was always on the best of terms, though he has never employed his muse to celebrate their particular virtues, as he has those of some lawyers and ministers.

In the following enquiry, then, I propose to trace this honourable connection of his with members of the medical profession; for there are next to no materials in the works of Burns themselves, out of which might be woven a piece of literary fabric, with some such title as *Medicine and the Kindred Arts in Burns.* There are none of those riches, like what we have in Shakspere, for instance, from which might be made such a wealthy contribution, or even the poor pretence of such, as *Medicine and the Kindred Arts in the Plays of Shakspere*, by the late Dr. John Moyes, edited by his friend, Dr. James Finlayson. With the exception of a few allusions, scattered here and there throughout his poems, which, doubt-

less, show some knowledge of medical nomenclature, as well as acquaintance with the symptoms of disease and the art of healing, there are practically no materials at all for a similar undertaking, even of the most limited kind. That his medical knowledge, so far as it went, was not without both soundness and point, is proven by its truthfulness to nature and skilled experience, as well as by the easy familiarity with which he handled it for the purposes of humourous satire. The man of poetical genius, to be sure, arrives at a good deal of his knowledge by intuition. That line, for instance, in "The Farmer's Ingle," by Burns's great exemplar, Ferguson—

> "The mind's ay cradled when the grave is near,"

is a very good illustration of the doctrine in question. It might have been written by an old man who had been witness to an hundred death beds, instead of by a mere youth of twenty who had probably never once seen a human being die, so Shakesperian is it in character. In the same way Burns, however he came by his medical knowledge—whether by the royal road of intuition, or the more prosaic one of observation and reflection—had the gift of employing it with equal effect, of which there are some striking specimens, though in a different vein from Fergusson's, in some of the verses of his "Epistle to John Goldie in Kilmarnock."

> "Poor, gapin, glowrin Superstition !
> Wae's me, she's in a sad condition :
> Fye ! bring *Black Jock*, her state physician,
> To see her water :
> Alas, there's ground for great suspicion
> She'll ne'er get better.

Enthusiasm's past redemption,
Gane in a gallopin consumption ;
Not a' her quacks, wi' a' their gumption,
Can ever mend her ;
Her feeble pulse gies strong presumption,
She'll soon surrender.

Auld Orthodoxy lang did grapple,
For every hole to get a stapple ;
But now she fetches at the thrapple,
An' fights for breath ;
Haste, gie her name up in the chapel,
'Near unto death.'"

And in "Death and Dr. Hornbook," there is a highly humorous inventory of the wares of the would-be village apothecary.

"'And then a' doctor's saws an' whittles,
Of a' dimensions, shapes, an' mettles,
A' kinds o' boxes, mugs an' bottles,
He's sure to hae ;
Their Latin names as fast he rattles
As A B C.

Calces o' fossils, earths, an' trees ;
True sal-marinum o' the seas ;
The farina o' beans an' pease
He has't in plenty ;
Aqua-fontis, what you please,
He can content ye.

Forbye some new, uncommon weapons,
Urinus spiritus of capons ;
Or mite-horn shavings, filings, scrapings,
Distill'd *per se ;*
Sal-alkali o' midge-tail-clippings,
And mony mae.'"

I never read Death's description of Hornbook's little stock-in-trade without calling to mind that famous inventory of the contents of another apothecary's shop in Mantua.

> "And in his needy shop a tortoise hung,
> An alligator stuff'd, and other skins
> Of ill-shaped fishes; and about his shelves
> A beggarly account of empty boxes,
> Green earthen pots, bladders and musty seeds,
> Remnants of pack-thread and old cakes of roses,
> Were thinly scatter'd, to make up a show."

Not that there is any very genuine resemblance to give countenance to the coincidence. On the contrary Shakspere's picture is intensely realistic, while Burns's is almost riotously humorous, and even bordering on the farcical. Neither is it possible, without running the risk of finding oneself in the classification of the witty Elia's "true Caledonian," to take this satire, as in any sense, pointing its shafts at quackery. Burns is not righteously indignant at the mischief this foolish schoolmaster and grocer is working on the bodies and health of village simpletons, but is provoked rather to intolerable mirth by the vanity and conceit of his assumed doctorship. It is splendid fun he is after—not reformation. And it probably never entered into his calculations that its effect would be to compel this self-appointed village apothecary—this man "o' saws an' whittles" to abandon, not only his doctorship, but his schoolmastership and small grocery as well, and even to forsake his native Tarbolton and seek his fortune in the western metropolis, where a grandson of his is a practitioner of the healing art at the present day, showing that the fatal proclivity towards

physic, so conspicuous in the Hornbook grandfather, must have run in the blood after all.

Since, then, the works of Burns afford no scope for linking his name with medicine and the kindred arts in any substantial sense, my task must, therefore, of necessity confine itself to his connection with those individual members of the medical profession who have been more or less distinguished as his intimates, correspondents, biographers, and critics and panegyrists of his life and writings. The materials for such an undertaking, if somewhat limited in extent, are exceedingly rich in character; and, as I said before, alike honourable, in the main, both to Burns and his medical friends and admirers.

If the doctors, in his own day and since, never boggled over his frailties, like the clergy, but have always been honourably distinguished by a wise toleration and charity, and the highest regard and enthusiasm in estimating the poet and his work, it is not, I trust, because the question of right conduct in man or woman is a less vital matter with them, but rather, I am inclined to believe, because of the difference of their point of view. This larger and more inseeing vision, which they generally bring to bear on all questions of human nature and conduct, they owe, I think, to their peculiar education and to their intercourse with disease, which makes them acquainted, in a most near-hand way, with the infirmities of their fellow creatures. The lawyer is chiefly conversant with the more equivocal side of human nature; the minister with the affected side—with mankind on their best behaviour; but the doctor knows us as we are—in undress, and that in more senses than the literal one. In a matter, therefore, of seeming moral declension the clergyman only sees *what's done, not what's resisted.* The medical man, on the other hand, sees

what's done too, but he also discerns what was perhaps irresistible, through some organic frailty, flaw, or imperfection, hereditary or acquired, in the unfortunate constitution of the delinquent, more sinned against, it may be, than sinning, hence his frequently greater charity and toleration.

Burns's first intimacy with a member of the medical faculty is a matter of some doubt. Chambers says that, although Burns was taken little notice of while flax-dressing in Irvine, it would appear that he was not unknown to the family of the provost, Mr. Hamilton of Craighlaw, whose house still stands at the corner where Glasgow Vennel and High Street meet—the immediate locality of the Poet's "heckling"-shop. His son, Dr. Hamilton, was one of the acquaintances of Burns who became security to the printer of the Kilmarnock edition. This, I presume, is the same gentleman, Dr. Hamilton of Kilmarnock House, whom the historian of Kilmarnock mentions when speaking of John Goldie, Major Parker, Dr. William Moore, Thomas Samson, Robert Muir, and others of the famous band of the Poet's Kilmarnock friends.

From this statement of Chambers, it would, therefore, appear more than probable that he may have been acquainted with Dr. Hamilton prior to his intimacy with Mr. John Mackenzie, a Mauchline surgeon, which began when he was twenty-four years of age, after his return to Lochlea, Tarbolton, and during his father's last illness, about the end of 1783. In an account of the good doctor's impressions of this remarkable Lochlea household, supplied to Josiah Walker, Esq., we learn something of the esteem in which he held its members. For the father and mother, and two eldest sons, Robert and Gilbert, he entertained the highest regard, and

was struck by the amount of general culture and intelligence, considering their sphere of life, shown by his patient and two sons; and especially by the brilliant conversational gifts of the Poet, of the extent of whose talents, he says, no person could have a just idea who had not had an opportunity to hear him converse.

The intercourse between doctor and bard, thus begun in the sick chamber of Lochlea, continued and ripened into genial friendship after the old man's death and the family's removal to Mossgiel. We have noteworthy testimony of this in a versified epistle Burns sent to his brother mason, inviting him to be present on the 24th June, 1786 (St. John's Day), at a grand procession of the St. James' Lodge, Tarbolton, and of which he himself was Depute Master.

"Friday first's the day appointed
By the Right Worshipful anointed,
To hold our grand procession;
To get a blad o' Johnie's morals,
And taste a swatch o' Manson's barrels
I' the way of our profession.
The Master and the Brotherhood
Would a' be glad to see you;
For me I would be mair than proud
To share the mercies wi' you.
If Death, then, wi' skaith, then,
Some mortal heart is hechtin,
Inform him, and storm him,
That Saturday you'll fecht him.

ROBERT BURNS."

"It is not very clear," says Wm. Scott Douglas, "who was the 'Johnie' thus expected to dilate on morals: Professor Walker tells us it was John Mackenzie himself, whose favourite topic was 'the origin of morals.'"

We also catch an interesting glimpse of their friendship on a September Sunday some three months later. Burns was on his way to church and had looked in on his friend Gavin Hamilton, whose house was contiguous to the church, expecting that he might accompany him thither. Gavin, however, declined, but told him to bring a note of the discourse in four stanzas. A bet was made between them on the point, and accordingly at the end of the forenoon service, Burns presented him with four of the verses of "The Calf," over which he had been musing in his pew, strange to say, at the very time that Jean Armour was giving birth to twins, but of which interesting event he was ignorant till later in the day. Dr. Mackenzie, happening to call at Gavin Hamilton's at the time that Burns was reading his performance, was so tickled with the verses that he extracted from him the promise of a copy, which he sent the same Sunday night, accompanied by a brief note, telling him that the fourth and last stanzas were added since he saw him that day.

Very vivid and human is the peep into this Sabbath nook of Mauchline life upwards of a hundred years ago, than which no other spot of Burns ground contains within such small compass so many memorials of those personages and dwellings celebrated in his poems and nearly associated with his own life-history. There is the sacred quiet of the two or three village streets, with the pensive colouring of the woods and fields all around. The old church, sitting dreamily amid its slanting tombstones, and overlooked from three different points—Nanse Tannock's, Gavin Hamilton's, and Poosie-Nansie's, has "skailed," and dotting the uneven surface of the churchyard are the sober forms of some of the lingering worshippers in "runkled blacks." On

the lawyer's parlour floor we recognise the three worthies, as distinctly as if the event were a thing of yesterday, Gavin Hamilton, Burns, and the village doctor, their heads together, and their risible faculties in full exercise as the verses of "The Calf" are being recited. Meanwhile the youthful minister, the Rev. James Steven, has descended from the pulpit and entered the session-house, or betaken himself to the manse, all unconscious of the three merry comrades in the lawyer's parlour, one of whom has given such poetical shape to his conceits, as will safely carry the young preacher down to posterity—a service he was not very likely to have done for himself.

Some six or seven weeks further on in the autumn, October 23rd, 1786, and three months after the publication of the Kilmarnock edition of his poems, we find Burns, with his doctor friend, a guest at the dinner-table of Professor Dugald Stewart, who was then staying at his country seat near Catrine, and to whose notice he had been introduced by the Mauchline surgeon. How he enjoyed himself at the Professor's dinner-table, that

> "Ne'er to be forgotten day,
> Sae far he sprachled up the brae,
> He dinner'd wi' a Lord,"

and the high opinion he formed of great folks and their simple dignity and unaffected manners, he tells us in a letter to the doctor a week after the event, enclosing a copy of verses, entitled, "Lines on Meeting with Lord Daer"—that young nobleman happening to be one of the dinner party on the eventful occasion.

The Mauchline surgeon not only introduced Burns to Professor Dugald Stewart, the philosopher, who, we know, from

that and subsequent interviews with him in Edinburgh, formed a very high opinion of his great intellectual and poetical gifts, his estimate in that respect somewhat resembling Carlyle's, but he also introduced him to his patient, Sir John Whitefoord, before that gentleman left Ballochmyle for the capital; and to the Hon. Henry Erskine, both of whom became his patrons and friends in Edinburgh. He likewise had the pleasure of making his works known to Dr. Blair, when that distinguished divine was on a visit to Barskimming, by showing him "The Holy Fair," in which poem, by the by, Mackenzie is himself said, by Chambers, to be mentioned under the name of "Common-Sense," he having written on some controversial topic under that title shortly before.

"In guid time comes an antidote
Against sic poisoned nostrum;
For Peebles, frae the Water-fit,
Ascends the holy rostrum;
See, up he's got the Word o' God,
And meek and mim has viewed it,
While *Common-Sense* has ta'en the road,
And aff and up the Cowgate,
Fast, fast that day."

It so happened that Mackenzie on this day of "The Holy Fair" was engaged to join Sir John Whitefoord of Ballochmyle, and go to Dumfries House, in Auchinleck parish, in order to dine with the Earl of Dumfries; so, after attending church, and listening to some of the out-door harangues, he was seen to leave the assembly and go off along the Cowgate, on his way to Ballochmyle, exactly as Peebles ascended the rostrum.

The subsequent history of this worthy and genial doctor may be briefly stated, as follows. On leaving Mauchline, with which he was doubly associated, inasmuch as he was married to one of its "six proper young belles," Miss Helen, daughter of John Miller of Millockshill, he commenced practice in Irvine. After a long and honourable career in that ancient and royal burgh, in the course of which he not only attained the highest honours of the magistracy, but, towards its close, in 1824, received from his *Alma Mater* the degree of M.D. for a thesis on "De Carcinomate," he retired in 1827 to Edinburgh, where he died, January 11th, 1837, at an advanced age. The well-known literary and antiquarian collector—the late John Whitefoord Mackenzie, W.S., Edinburgh, was his son.

And as a convincing proof that the doctor's interest in Burns had not cooled in the long interval since he left the atmosphere of Mauchline and its neighbourhood, it is recorded of him that, on the founding of the Irvine Burns Club in 1827, the year of his retiral, he presided at the opening dinner on January 25th, with the well-known Mr. David Sillar, "a brither poet" *(Epistle to Davie)*, as vice-chairman.

It is a singular circumstance and, therefore, worthy of notice here, before finally passing from Mauchline to trace the Poet's medical intimacies in Edinburgh, that another of these *belles*, the witty Miss Smith, should likewise have secured for a husband a medical man, who was also a valued friend and correspondent of Burns: I refer to his old schoolfellow at Dalrymple and Ayr,

MR. JAMES CANDLISH.

It would appear that young Candlish was originally intended by his parents for the Church, but, on account of creed scruples, drifted into medicine. Towards the close of his medical curriculum at Glasgow University he taught languages at Mauchline, and while there formed the intimacy of Jane Smith, his future wife, who became the mother of the celebrated divine, Dr. Candlish of Edinburgh. As he was never robust, and diffident and shy almost to painfulness, he eschewed general practice, and settled in Edinburgh about 1788, as a teacher of medicine, in which he won well-merited distinction. Here he was made known to many of its leading personages by Burns, who had just bidden his final adieu to the city. In a letter to Mr. Peter Hill, written from Ellisland about March, 1789, accompanying the gift of a ewe-milk cheese, the Poet, in enumerating their common friends who might be permitted to taste it, names Mr. Candlish in the following enthusiastic terms :—" Candlish, the earliest friend, except my only brother, that I have on earth, and one of the worthiest of fellows that ever any man called by the name of friend, if a luncheon of my best cheese would help to rid him of part of his superabundant modesty, you would do well to give it him."

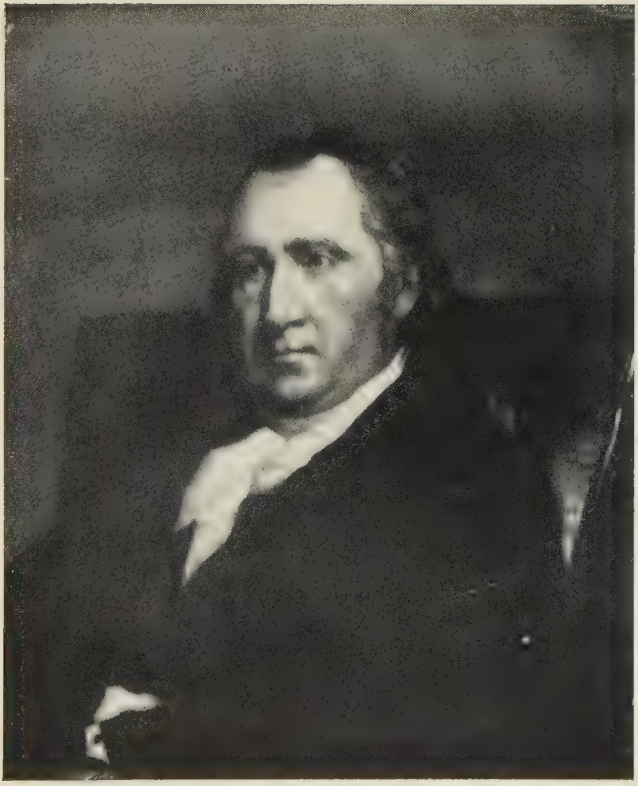
He died somewhat suddenly of a brain affection on April 29th, 1806, at the early age of forty-six, having been born the same year as Burns—1759.

II.

Drs. GREGORY, WOOD, ADAIR, Etc., EDINBURGH.

In little more than a month after dining at Catrine House Burns had bidden farewell, for a season at least, to the rural life around Mauchline, and the congenial society of his friends, Gavin Hamilton and Dr. Mackenzie, and betaken himself to the gay capital. Thither Professor Stewart had gone before him, to commence his winter session at the University, in the beginning of November, carrying with him a copy of the humble Kilmarnock volume to introduce it to the notice of his friend, Mr. Henry Mackenzie, the author of *The Man of Feeling*, who gave it a generous and highly appreciative criticism in *The Lounger*, a periodical work published in Edinburgh by Mr. Creech. By this means the Poet's fame may be said to have, in a great measure, preceded him, so that on his arrival in *Fair Edina* he was at once installed as the intimate and associate of its aristocratic leaders of fashion, its men of science, and its brilliant remnant of Scottish literati who adorned the latter half of the eighteenth century, and who then formed such a conspicuous element of the best Edinburgh society, numbering, as it did, amongst its circle such names as Dr. Robertson, Dr. Blair, Dr. Gregory, Dr. Adam Ferguson, Mr. Mackenzie, and Mr. Fraser Tytler.

It was at the hospitable table of Lord Monboddo, who was then as remarkable for his classic suppers as for the



PROFESSOR JAMES GREGORY, M.D.

From an Engraving, by the kind permission of James L. Caw, Esq., of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

beauty of his daughter, that Burns made the acquaintance of Dr. James Gregory, the Professor of the Practice of Medicine in Edinburgh University, the scion of a family distinguished for generations for their great learning, and himself, not only the leading member of his profession in Edinburgh, but the witty and humorous associate of the men of letters and fashion in the capital, and a brother of the Cannongate Kilwinning Lodge of Free Masons.

The following incident is related by Chambers as happening at the table of Lord Monboddo between Burns and the doctor at the beginning of their acquaintanceship. "Dr. Gregory, who, feeling some interest in the psychology of such a prodigy of genius, began to question Burns about his family history. The Bard had been dining with Mr. Howden, jeweller, Parliament Square, and was much in a humour for waggery. 'Well, Burns,' said the learned physician, 'What sort of man was your father?—a tall man?' 'Yes, rather.' 'A dark-complexioned man?' 'Yes.' 'And your mother?' 'My mother was not a man at all, sir.' By this grammatical quip the doctor was sadly discomfited; and Burns next day made his friend Howden laugh heartily at the joke in his shop in Parliament Square."

In spite of this somewhat inauspicious-looking commencement, the intimacy thus begun soon ripened into genuine friendship, which is all the more remarkable considering the difference in their education and position; but perhaps, as Chambers suggests, "their common liability to the *saeva indignatio* when their feelings were offended by foolish or sordid conduct," had contributed towards it. That Burns, at anyrate, on his part, was deeply impressed from their first meetings at Lord Monboddo's "with the large intelligence,

vigorous thought, and high-minded benevolence of the learned author of the *Conspectus Medicinæ*," we have his own testimony to prove, written on the blank page of an English translation of Cicero's Select Orations (London, 1756), presented to him by the doctor.

"EDIN., 23rd April, 1787.

"This book, a present from the truly worthy and learned Dr. Gregory, I shall preserve to my latest hour, as a mark of the gratitude, esteem, and veneration I bear the Donor. So help me God !

"ROBERT BURNS."

Three weeks after penning the above characteristic declaration, we find him paying the doctor a compliment in verse. The literary set who were in the habit of meeting at Lord Monboddo's also frequented in the mornings the house in High Street of Mr. Wm. Creech, the publisher, and that to such an extent that the meeting used to be called *Creech's Levee.* It happened, however, about this time, that the continuity of these gatherings was broken for a little through the absence of Mr. Creech on a visit to London, and Burns took the occasion to indite to his publisher a humorous lamentation, in the following couple of stanzas of which he has enshrined not only the doctor, but the entire literary coterie.

"Nae mair we see his levee door
Philosophers and poets pour,
And toothy critics by the score,
In bloody raw !
The adjutant o' a' the core,
Willie's awa !

"Now worthy Gregory's Latin face,
Tytler's and Greenfield's modest grace;
Mackenzie, Stewart, sic a brace
As Rome ne'er saw;
They a' maun meet some ither place,
Willie's awa!"

When the Poet was confined to his lodgings for several weeks with his sprained knee (during which period transpired the famous Clarinda and Sylvander correspondence) Dr. Gregory attended him in the capacity of physician, while Mr. Alexander Wood officiated as surgeon. During the visits of the learned author of the *Conspectus Medicinae*, who in his day and place was looked upon as a prince of critics, he was in the habit of submitting not only his own verses, but Clarinda's as well, to the doctor's critical inspection. In one of his epistles to that lady he tells her that a gentleman for whose character, abilities, and critical knowledge he had the highest veneration had just called in, "and I read," he says, "to this much-respected friend several of my own bagatelles, and, among others, your lines, which I had copied out. He began some criticisms on them as on the other pieces, when I informed him they were the work of a young lady in this town, which, I assure you, made him stare. My learned friend seriously protested that he did not believe any young woman in Edinburgh was capable of such lines; and if you know anything of Professor Gregory, you will neither doubt his abilities nor his sincerity."

But this same able and sincere critic, who had been so lenient and complimentary towards the versicles of Clarinda, could, we shall see, be just as severe on occasion to the compositions of her Sylvander. From Ellisland Burns had sent,

for the doctor's criticism, a short poem "On Seeing a Fellow Wound a Hare with a Shot, April, 1789," and criticise it he did with a vengeance. To begin with, he acknowledges that the verses have real poetic merit, such as fancy and tenderness, and some happy expressions; so much so, indeed, that they are the more deserving of careful revisal and the utmost polish; and he cites, as an example of what correctness and high polish can do in enhancing such compositions, the two last pieces of Mrs. Hunter's poetry that he had given him. The Mrs. Hunter here referred to, by the by, is the wife of the celebrated surgeon, John Hunter, and the authoress of that beautiful song, "My mother bids me bind my hair." It is, therefore, highly gratifying that, if we cannot link the name of the father of British medicine with that of Burns in our enquiry, we can employ his wife's in that connection. Dr. Gregory appears to have been a great admirer of Mrs. Hunter's poetry, though on the appearance of her volume in 1802 it met with but little mercy at the hands of Francis Jeffrey, who said, "Poetry does not appear to be her vocation, and rather seems to have been studied as an accomplishment than pursued from any natural propensity." There were other critics, however, who, it is but fair to say, admired her poetry equally with Dr. Gregory, who, in the letter we are commenting on, requests Burns to furnish him with another and amended edition of his verses on *The Wounded Hare* to send to Mrs. Hunter, who, he feels sure, will have much pleasure in reading it. "Pray give me likewise for myself," he asks, "and her too, a copy—as much amended as you please—of the *Water-Fowl on Loch Turrit.* Let me see you," he adds, "when you come to town, and I will show you some of Mrs. Hunter's poems."

To return, however, to his criticism of *The Wounded Hare*. "As you desire it," he says, "I shall, with great freedom, give you my *most rigorous* criticisms on your verses. *The Wounded Hare* is a pretty good subject; but the measure, or stanza, you have chosen for it, is not a good one; it does not flow well; and the rhyme of the fourth line is almost lost by its distance from the first; and the two interposed, close rhymes. If I were you I would put it into a different stanza yet.

"*Stanza I.*—The execrations in the first two lines are strong or coarse; but they may pass. 'Murder-aiming' is a bad compound epithet, and not very intelligible. 'Blood-stained,' in stanza III., line 4, has the same fault: *Bleeding* bosom is infinitely better. You have accustomed yourself to such epithets, and have no notion how stiff and quaint they appear to others, and how incongruous with poetic fancy, and tender sentiments. Suppose Pope had written, 'Why that blood-stained bosom gored,' how would you have liked it? *Form* is neither a poetic, nor a dignified, nor a plain, common word: it is a mere sportsman's word; unsuitable to pathetic or serious poetry. 'Mangled' is a coarse word. 'Innocent,' in this sense, is a nursery word; but both may pass.

Stanza 4.—'Who will now provide that life a mother only can bestow,' will not do at all: it is not grammar—it is not intelligible. Do you mean 'provide for that life which the mother had bestowed and used to provide for?'

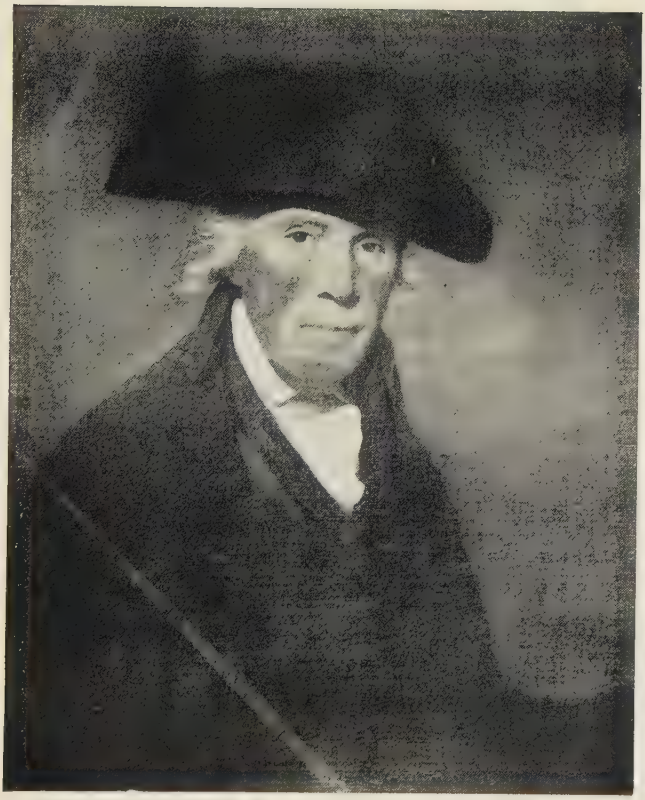
There was a ridiculous slip of the pen, 'Feeling' (I suppose) for 'Fellow,' in the title of your copy of verses; but even fellow would be wrong: it is but a colloquial and vulgar word, unsuitable to your sentiments. 'Shot' is improper too

—On seeing a person (or a sportsman) wound a hare; it is needless to add with what weapon; but if you think otherwise, you should say, *with a fowling-piece.*"

More *rigorous*, blunt, and unceremonious, in view of the above quotation, he could hardly have shown himself had he been a schoolmaster correcting a pupil's English composition exercise. Dr. Currie, in a foot note to this letter says, and with truth, "It must be admitted that this criticism is not more distinguished by its good sense, than by its freedom from ceremony. It is impossible not to smile at the manner in which the Poet may be supposed to have received it. In fact, it appears, as the sailors say, to have thrown him *quite a-back.* In a letter which he wrote soon after, he says, 'Dr. G—— is a good man, but he crucifies me.' And again, 'I believe in the iron justice of Dr. G——; but like the devils, I believe and tremble.' However, he profited by these criticisms, as the reader will find, by comparing this first edition of the poem, with that published afterwards."

DR. WOOD.

Alexander Wood, Surgeon, Royal Exchange, Edinburgh, whom we saw attended Burns in conjunction with his colleague, Dr. Gregory, though not the Johnsonian personality in literary circles that the learned author of the *Conspectus Medicinae* was, nevertheless, by virtue of his intimacy and friendship with the Poet, deserves a notice to himself. *Lang Sandy Wood*, as he was usually styled, on account of his lengthy lanky figure, "was," says Chambers, "a man after Burns's own heart—kind, quaint, fond of children and animals; he even resembled the poet so specifically, as to



Dr. ALEXANDER WOOD

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have had at one time a pet sheep, which, like Burns's *Mailie*, 'trotted by him' through all the town on his professional visits—a trait of eccentricity that strongly recalls the simple, cordial days of our grandfathers." This highly gifted, active, benevolent, simple, and warm-hearted surgeon, was a member of the C.K. Lodge of Free Masons, at one of the meetings of which he is said to have first made the acquaintance of the Poet, for whose genius he entertained the general share of admiration. He afterwards, as before remarked, attended him for his bruised limb, while Burns was chafing at the enforced confinement his injury entailed, and conducting the romantic Sylvander and Clarinda correspondence. Clarinda, herself the daughter of a Glasgow physician, in one of these remarkable epistles, wrote, "I am glad to hear Mr. Wood attends you; he is a good soul, and a safe surgeon. I know him a little. Do as he bids, and I trust your leg will soon be quite well."

Lord President Dundas, of the Court of Session, dying somewhat suddenly about this time, 13th December, 1787, it is stated that Mr. Charles Hay, Advocate, pressed Burns to compose some elegiac verses on the occasion, and that Dr. Wood warmly seconded the proposal, suggesting that the poetic compliment might lead to some beneficial results, through the powerful political influence of the Dundas family. There appears, however, to be some discrepancy regarding these statements; for in a letter to Charles Hay, Esq., Advocate, enclosing a copy of the elegiac performance, while Burns still gives that gentleman the credit of suggesting the subject to him, he, in another epistle to Alex. Cunninghame, says, "My very worthy and respected friend, Mr. Alexander Wood, Surgeon, urged me to pay a compliment in the way

of my trade to his Lordship's memory," a task in which he does not appear to have had very much heart. Whichever of the two gentlemen was the proposer, and whichever the seconder, it was certainly Dr. Wood who carried the elegy, together with a letter, (written, the Poet confesses, in his very best manner, whatever the quality of the verses) to Mr. Solicitor Dundas, the dead Lord's son, "And not finding him at home, left the parcel for him. His Solicitorship, however, never took the smallest notice of the letter, the poem, or the poet." The following note subjoined to a copy of the elegy shows how the Bard felt the treatment of the great Dundas family. "The foregoing poem has some tolerable lines in it, but the incurable wound of my pride will not suffer me to correct or even peruse it. I sent a copy of it with my best prose letter, to the son of the great man, the theme of the piece, by the hand, too, of one of the noblest men in God's world, Alexander Wood, Surgeon, when behold his Solicitorship took no more notice of my poem, or me, than I had been a strolling fiddler, who made free with his lady's name over the head of a silly new reel! Did the gentleman think I looked for any dirty gratuity?"

If this proposal of the kind and simple surgeon, in the interest of his poet-patient, turned out a melancholy failure, he was more fortunate in another matter he took in hand. I refer to his exertions in recommending Burns to the Commissioners of Excise, and on which recommendation his enrolment as an officer followed.

Dr. James M'Kittrick Adair.

A young relative of Mrs. Dunlop and the son of a physician in Ayr, to whom Burns had before been introduced by the Rev. Mr. Lawrie, minister of Loudoun, falls also, most conveniently to be noticed here, as it was from Edinburgh that the doctor and he, sometime in October, 1787, and immediately after the Poet's second visit to the capital, set out together on a short tour, by Stirling, Devon, Clackmannan, and Dunfermline, the highly interesting and piquant details of which he afterwards communicated to Dr. Currie for his memoir. In the vale of Devon, where they were storm-stayed for a week, they were the guests of Mrs. Hamilton of Harvieston, and the young doctor fell in love with the eldest daughter, Charlotte, sister of Burns's bosom friend, Gavin Hamilton of Mauchline, which lady, two years later, he married, and settled down to medical practice at the Pleasance, Edinburgh. Subsequently he removed to Harrogate, where he died in 1802, at the early age of thirty-seven. His widow survived him four years, dying at Edinburgh at the age of forty-three.

M. Fyfe, Surgeon,

with whose name, as a fitting close to the present paper, I shall now bid farewell to the Edinburgh faculty; and I cannot do so more appropriately than in the Poet's own words, addressed to his friend, Dr. Fyfe, half-an-hour before turning his back on the *palaces and towers of Edina*, where his marvellous personality had so bewitched its society, and where, at a price, I fear, infinitely above its value, he had bought such a variegated human experience.

"Saturday morn: six o'clock.

MY DEAR SIR,—My loins are girded, my sandals on my feet and my staff in my hand; and in half-an-hour I shall set off from this venerable, respectable, hospitable, social, convivial, imperial Queen of cities, Auld Reekie. My compliments to Mr. M'Cartney, and I have sent him that engraving. Farewell!

'Now, God in heaven bless Reekie's town
With plenty, joy, and peace!
And may her wealth and fair renown
To latest times increase!!!—Amen.'

ROBERT BURNS."

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Dr. JOHN MOORE

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III.

Dr. JOHN MOORE, LONDON,

was the son of an Episcopal clergyman at Stirling, where he was born in 1730. He studied at Glasgow and Paris, served as a surgeon in the army, and practised in Glasgow. He had his residence first in Donald's Land, Trongate, opposite the Tron Steeple (where his son, Sir John, the hero of Corunna, was born), and afterwards in Dunlop Street. He was a great friend of Smollet, the author of *Roderick Random*, who, a few years his senior, was at this time being initiated into the mysteries of pharmacy and minor surgery in Dr. Gordon's dingy little apothecary, situated in Gibson's Land, at the north corner of Salt Market and Prince's Street, where Moore had also been an apprentice before setting up as a surgeon in the Trongate. From 1772 to 1778 he travelled on the Continent with Douglas, eighth Duke of Hamilton, and afterwards settled in London as a man of letters. He wrote *Zeluca*, a novel; *A View of Society and Manners in France; Edward*, a novel, etc.

He would be some few years resident in London, when Burns, during the early part of his Edinburgh career, entered into a most interesting correspondence with him, which extended over a period of fully four years, and continued down almost to the end of the Ellisland days. The Poet wrote eight letters in all, including the famous autobiographical one, dated Mossgeil, August 2nd, 1787, which

he penned on his return home after his first visit to Edinburgh, and which has formed the basis of all his future biographies; while Moore, on the other hand, wrote six. The immediate occasion of this correspondence was Mrs. Dunlop sending to Burns certain passages extracted from the doctor's letters to herself, containing flattering notices of his poems, and suggesting that he would not be unwilling to open a correspondence with him. These extracts he received on the 30th December, 1786, and it was the 16th or 17th January, 1787, before he mustered courage to write to Dr. Moore, the reason he assigned to Mrs. Dunlop for this delay being, that he wanted to write in a manner at once worthy of such a celebrated author and his own character.

These two conditions, I should say, are amply fulfilled in the opening letter of this correspondence. It is modest and deferential, as became it, to the great literary magnate he considered he was addressing; and it is dignified and honest, as it should be, coming from a peasant poet who, while perfectly well aware that the novelty of his character had by far the greater share in the learned and polite notice he had lately received—that, indeed, the hope to be admired for ages, even for authors of repute, was often "an unsubstantial dream,"—nevertheless knew that he had some ability, and had, moreover, claims to depict the humbler rural national life of which his poems treat, he being himself, in birth, education, and feeling, one of themselves.

The doctor, in his well-bred reply, January 23rd, 1787, may be said to be equally happy. He compliments the Poet on his disposition and temper, of which he takes a favourable impression from his works—regrets he did not see him last summer when in Scotland, which he certainly would have

done had he only seen his poems earlier, and which poems he greatly admires, not so much for those original and brilliant poetical beauties so lavishly scattered through them, as for the love of his native country—that feeling of sensibility to all objects of humanity which they display, and the independent spirit which breathes through the whole.

In his second letter, February 15th, 1787, Burns is still more deferential to the great literateurs, of whom he looked upon Moore as one; and contrasts the time, when he followed the plough and could boast of nothing higher than a distant acquaintanceship with a country clergyman, with his present situation, when genius, polished by learning, and at its proper elevation in the eye of the world, is his frequent associate, making him, whom mere greatness could never embarass, tremble at its approach. That he has some merit, he repeats, he will not deny, and again emphasises his belief, which he has arrived at with frequent wringings of heart, that it is the novelty of his character, and the honest national prejudice of his countrymen, more than his poetic abilities, to which he owes his present elevation among great society folks.

The doctor in his reply, February 28th, 1787, and apparently on the strength of his correspondent's over-generous compliments to the Edinburgh literati in the contrast he draws between his past and present, remarks, a little ungraciously, I think, "It is not surprising that you improve in correctness and taste, considering where you have been for some time past." This taking of Burns so completely at his word shows just the least touch of *Caledonianism* in the doctor, who, however, has shrewdly enough read his poetic character, to dare swear that there is no danger of his

admitting any polish which might weaken the vigour of his native powers. He is also obliging enough to say that he is glad to perceive that he disdains to decry his own merit as a poet, which, to do, would be to arraign the fixed opinion of the public.

About two months after this, April 23rd, 1787, Burns again writes, in terms of most grateful warmth, to thank the doctor for his present of *View of Society*, a gift he values even more as a mark of the author's friendly esteem than for its own intrinsic worth. He talks of leaving Edinburgh soon, and again comments on the fact, as if the subject haunted him with a kind of grudge, that the intimacies and friendships which he has formed among the rich, the great, the fashionable, and the polite, are all of too tender a construction to bear carriage 150 miles—that, having no equivalent to offer, he is afraid his meteor appearance will by no means entitle him to a settled correspondence with any of those who are the permanent lights of genius and literature.

Moore, in his acknowledgment of this letter, May 23rd, 1787, takes no notice of his correspondent's harp, harping upon the old string—that the seeming friendship between the Edinburgh celebrities and him must sooner or later come to an end. His studious silence on the subject rather, I should say, accentuates its point in the mind of the Poet; as does also that passage where he begs that he will not give himself the trouble of writing to him when it is inconvenient, and that he will make no apology, when he does write, for having postponed it, but to be assured, nevertheless, that he will always be happy to hear from him. Like a polite and shrewd man of the world, and his correspondent's elder in affairs literary, he takes up the safer rôle of critic and general

adviser. He has just received the new edition of poems through Creech, and points out to the author that it is not incumbent on him to send copies to each subscriber proportionate to his subscription money, most subscribers only expecting one copy, no matter how many they may have subscribed for. He thinks highly of some of the poems added to the new edition, particularly the *Winter Night*, the *Address to Edinburgh*, *Green Grow the Rashes*, and the two songs immediately following, the latter of which, *The Gloomy Night is Gathering Fast*, is exquisite. And here the doctor shows his critical insight and discrimination by pointing out to Burns that he has a peculiar talent for such lyrical compositions, which he ought, therefore, to indulge, as no kind of poetry demands more delicacy or higher polishing. He is of opinion, however, that there is nothing added equal to his *Vision* and *Cotter's Saturday Night*, as in these are united fine imagery, natural and pathetic description, with sublimity of language and thought. Seeing he possesses such great variety of expression and command of the English language, he advises him to deal more sparingly for the future in the provincial dialect. "Why should you," he asks, "by using that, limit the number of your admirers to those who understand the Scottish, when you can extend it to all persons of taste who understand the English language?" He proposes to him to plan some larger work than he has yet attempted, and to study first, with a view to its proper execution, the best English poets, and a little more of history, such as the Greek and Roman stories (abridged); also heathen mythology for the charmingly fanciful allusions contained therein, and modern history of France and Great Britain, from the beginning of Henry the Seventh's reign. He asks a sight of

his unpublished satirical and humorous poems, in which he thinks him very strong, and pawns his word to give no copies; understands he intends to take a farm, but hopes the business of husbandry won't prevent him from making occasional addresses to the Muses. Virgil, before him, proved to the world that there is nothing in the business of husbandry inimical to poetry, and trusts his correspondent may afford an example of a good poet being a successful farmer. Finally, he winds up by saying that if he is ever in Scotland he will make a point of seeing him, and, on the other hand, should Burns ever have occasion calling him to London he promises him a cordial welcome from his family.

Since receiving this letter the Poet had made that pilgrimage over some of the classic ground of Caledonia, Cowden Knowes, Banks of Yarrow, Tweed, etc., which he told the doctor in his last epistle he was about to set out upon, and had returned home again to his family and friends at Mauchline. It was during his brief sojourn at Mossgiel that he made a stolen visit, in the end of June, to the Western Highlands, the calf-country of Mary Campbell; and returning by Dumbarton and Paisley made the acquaintance of another doctor. He was standing in one of the streets of the latter town with his friend, Alex. Pattison, bookseller, when Dr. John Taylor, happening to be passing, and at once recognising Burns from his portrait, introduced himself, and proposed that the Poet and his friend should accompany him home, which they did (at first with reluctance, but afterwards, as the "crack" became good, seemed in no hurry to depart), and spent a most agreeable afternoon in conversation; for the doctor, if not exactly a poet like every tenth Paisley body, possessed the temperament of that erratic class in a high degree. And it was also

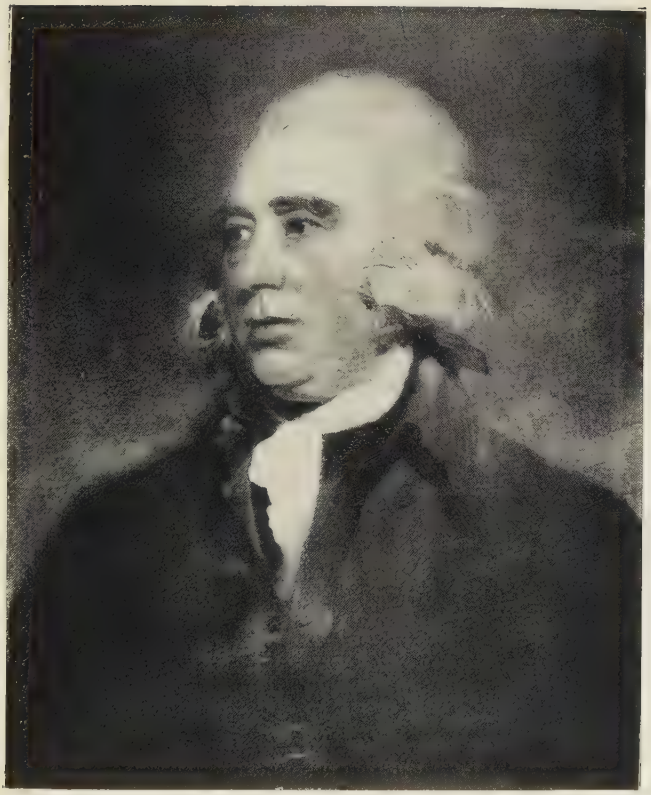
during his short stay at Mossgiel (for he was soon off to Edinburgh again, and to his northern tour with Nicoll), that, being confined, as he says, with some lingering complaints of a gastric origin, and to divert his spirits a little from this miserable fog of *ennui*, he penned his autobiographical letter, August 2nd, 1787, to Dr. Moore, which, as I said before, has formed the basis of all his subsequent biographies.

The doctor's reply, 8th November, 1787, if packed, as usual, with good and serious advice, about the advisability of his using the Doric more sparingly in future, planning some larger and more important work, and looking forward to a further publication of his pieces, carefully collected, revised, and polished, is also exceedingly cordial and happy, particularly in his parodying of Othello's defence in acknowledging the merits of the Poet's own account of himself, "and the admirable manner in which

> "You run it through even from your boyish days
> To the very moment that you kindly tell it.
> Your moving accident in the harvest field
> With her whose voice thrill'd *like th' Æolian Harp.*
> Your hairbreadth 'scapes in *th' imminent deadly breach,*
> The process raised by holy cannibals
> Who such devour as follow Nature's law,
> Your wild and headstrong rage for matrimony,
> Your redemption thence, whereof by parcels
> I had something heard, but not distinctly."

Burns had spent his second winter in Edinburgh, with its Highland and other tours; its Clarinda fever, and other dissipations, revelries, and hospitalities; and had been installed for a few months at Ellisland when he next, January 4th, 1789, addressed Dr. Moore. It is rather singular to

observe how he never seems to get away from his first idea of the doctor's greatness when he begins to write to him. The very thought of doing so, which has suggested itself to him three or four times every week these last six months, he says, "gives me something so like the idea of an ordinary-sized statue offering at a conversation with the Rhodian Colossus, that my mind misgives me, and the affair always miscarries somewhere between purpose and resolve." Now that he has started, however, he writes a pretty long letter, in the opening paragraph of which he again declares that, though willing to look upon himself as having some pretensions from nature to the poetic character, he knows a great deal of the late *eclat* was owing to the singularity of his situation, and the honest prejudice of Scotsmen. Proceeding, he makes some very acute observations on the Muses' trade, the aptitude to learn which, he acknowledges, is a gift from Heaven, while excellence in it is the fruit of industry and pains. He is not going to be in a hurry publishing again, but is, nevertheless, determined to pursue the vocation of poetry with the utmost vigour and enthusiasm. The worst of it is that when the poet finishes a piece, what with viewing and reviewing it, he loses in some measure his critical discrimination. Then he wants a friend, with a touch of kindness as well as candour; and he proposes to engage the doctor in that capacity by sending him an essay in poesy, which, as if disposed to take advice about abandoning the provincial dialect, is an experiment in English, and not, it must be confessed, by any means a happy one. This poetical epistle, in the style of Pope's *Moral Epistles*, is addressed to Mr. Robert Graham of Fintry, and has to do with his aspirations to be appointed Excise officer of the division of the district in which he



DR. JOHN MOORE

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resides; for, though he has taken a farm, and a wife too, he has about as much reason to be disappointed with the former as he has to be abundantly satisfied with the latter. That, however, it was neither unskillful husbandry, nor the want of personal industry, which was the cause of his dissatisfaction and farm-failure, we have the testimony of his own thrifty and managing Jean, and also that of his man-servant, William Clark, who lived with him in the winter of 1789-90. Indeed, to keep down expenses he for a time did the work of two or three men, riding, on an average, two hundred miles a week as an exciseman, and both ploughing and sowing whenever his excise duties would allow him. The farm, declares Chambers, was really a bad bargain, and something might have been made of it with more capital, but Burns could not brook the idea of recalling his loan to his brother, and found his own prosperity by ruining the Ayrshire household.

Some three months after unbosoming himself of these, among other, personal confidences, including some rather outspoken observations concerning Mr. Creech, his publisher, from whom he seems to despair of ever getting a settlement, he takes occasion to write the doctor again, March 23rd, 1789, introducing a neighbour, the Rev. Mr. Neilson, who is on his way to France, in order that he might instruct his Reverence how best to get thither after crossing the Channel. He encloses an ode, which, he says, "is a *compliment* to the memory of the late Mrs. Oswald of Auchincruive" (a lady whom he thinks the doctor knew personally, an honour of which he himself could not boast), whose funeral cortege arriving at the little Sanquhar inn on a wild wintry night, where he was intending to rest himself and his jaded Pegasus

till morn, compelled him to again face the blast and travel twelve miles further on, through the wildest moors and hills of Ayrshire, to New Cumnock, the next inn. Here, after a good fire had so far recovered his frozen sinews, he sat down and wrote his ode. Like his epistle to Graham of Fintry, it is an experiment in English, and a very indifferent experiment, it must be admitted, it is. Moreover, it is the product of a bit of bad temper, which circumstances, doubtless, made excusable; but there can be no excuse for the worse than bad taste which not only makes him hold up to execration the memory of a lady, whom Chambers considers not fairly liable to any such censure, but circulates the libel among the lady's friends. "I was at Edinburgh lately," he adds in the tail of his letter, "and settled finally with Mr. Creech; and I must own that, at last, he has been amicable and fair with me."

In the next epistle he receives from Moore, June 10th, 1789, he thanks him for the different communications of his occasional productions in manuscript; all of which have merit, and some of them merit of a different kind from what appears in published poems; but he takes no notice of his injudicious lampoon on the late Mrs. Oswald. These occasional productions he advises him to carefully preserve, with a view to publication either in Edinburgh or London, and promises him all the assistance in the matter he can. Then, returning to his pet subject, he urges him to abandon his Scottish stanza and dialect, and use the English, as Scottish stanza is fatiguing to English ears, and, he thinks, cannot be very agreeable to Scottish. All fine satire and humour in *Holy Fair* is lost to the English people, and could so easily be turned into English. He also suggests to him that he

should carefully collect and polish his occasional pieces, with a view to publication, a labour which would not interfere with his business as a husbandman, in which he understands he is very learned. And, finally, he presents him with a copy of his novel *Zeluco*, and shall be glad to have his opinion of it, because he knows he is above saying what he does not think.

In returning thanks for the present of *Zeluco*, a year later, 14th July, 1790, Burns must have whetted the doctor's appetite to a tantalising degree by his report of how he had disfigured its pages with annotations, as "I never take it up," he says, "without at the same time taking my pencil, and marking with asterisms, parentheses, etc., wherever I meet with an original thought, a nervous remark on life and manners, a remarkable, well-turned period, or a character sketched with uncommon precision." He has gravely planned, he tells him, a comparative view of himself, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett, in their different qualities and merits as novelists, but it does not appear that he ever brought the business to bear.

His eighth and last letter, enclosing copies of his *Tam o' Shanter*, *Elegy on Captain Henderson*, and the ballad on *Queen Mary*, is dated still from Ellisland, 28th February, 1791, some nine or ten months before removing to Bank Street, Dumfries, and discourses, among other things, upon the wisdom of cherishing the memories of our departed friends, the value of which, however problematical to the dead, is of infinite service to the living. He has just read over once more of many times his *Zeluco*, marking with his pencil, as he went along, every passage that pleased him particularly above the rest, and one or two of which, with

humble deference, he is disposed to think unequal to the merits of the book; but, so far, he has not gratified the doctor's curiosity by transcribing them, as he half-promised and intended. As to his private concerns, he is going on as a mighty tax-gatherer before the Lord, and has lately had the interest to get himself ranked on the list of Excise as a supervisor, though not yet employed as such. He laments the death of his kind patron the Earl of Glencairn, not so much because he recognises that his getting forward now in the Excise will be all the more difficult, as on account of the grateful attachment he felt towards him, pervading his very soul and entwining itself with the very thread of his existence. However, he wont despair so long as he can live and rhyme, and provide worthily for the maintenance and the education of his family without parting with any of his independence.

If Moore's reply, November 29th, 1791, to this letter, criticising *Tam o' Shanter* and *Matthew Henderson*, is not so enthusiastic as might have been expected, his advice on another point is full of good sense: I refer to his warning him against his imprudence in scattering abroad so many copies of his verses. His motive for this caution is, that he wishes him to collect all his fugitive pieces, not already printed, and, after they have been reconsidered and polished to the utmost of his power, to publish them by subscription, in which enterprise he promises to exert himself with pleasure. In his future compositions he again wishes he would use the modern English. "You have," he says, "shown your powers in Scottish sufficiently. Although in certain subjects it gives additional zest to the humour, yet it is lost to the English; and why should you write only for a

part of the island, when you can command the admiration of the whole." He reminds him again, too, that he has never yet transmitted those marginal annotations of *Zeluco*, which he spoke of in a former communication, and begs him to do so now, assuring him, at the same time, that whatever their nature, they will break no squares between them. And, lastly, he asks him, if he chances to write to his friend Mrs. Dunlop, to excuse his silence to her, as he hardly ever pens a line but on business, "which apathy of friendship the devil take!" exclaimed Burns when he conveyed the doctor's excuse to Mrs. Dunlop the next time he wrote to her. And his business now, he says, in writing to him is to instigate him to a new publication, and to tell him that, when he thinks he has a sufficient number of pieces to make a volume, he should set his friends on getting subscriptions. He has many more things to say, which would be easier spoken than written, and if ever he goes to Scotland, he will let him know, that he may meet him at his own house, or at his friend Mrs. Hamilton's, or both.

As it turned out, however, neither he nor the doctor ever looked upon each other in the flesh. And if they held no further correspondence with each other, it was not because Burns, at least, had exhausted his interest in, or respect for, his old correspondent, as is manifest from a letter written three years afterwards to Mrs. Dunlop, while that lady was on a visit to London. "You will have seen," he says, "our worthy and ingenious friend the Doctor (Dr. Moore) long ere this. I hope he is well, and beg to be remembered to him. I have just been reading over again, I daresay for the hundred and fiftieth time, his *View of Society and Manners;* and still I read it with delight." But whether this feat is to be

credited as a tribute to the reader, or the author, who, I fear, is hardly ever read at all now unless by the curious, it were difficult to say. "His humour," he adds, "is perfectly original—it is neither the humour of Addison, nor Swift, nor Sterne, nor of anybody but Dr. Moore," which is making out a good case for the individuality of his author, if the critic was not known to have the *good fault* of being more generous than discriminating in the praise of his contemporaries.

And, as might have been anticipated, considering the Poet's circumstances, and what is still more unreckonable as a factor of destiny, his characterisation, none of the doctor's advice, so frequently and so earnestly proferred, seems ever to have been acted upon. Burns's persistence in sticking to the vernacular showed him to be wiser in his day and generation than Moore, whose advice on this point is entirely out of harmony with the best of later-day criticism. He instinctively felt that, for him at least, there were infinite possibilities of expression in the Scottish which were not in the English. Neither could he, to his latest day, ever be got to look upon literature as a business—its commercial side had no charms for him. There was, moreover, in his mind, perhaps just the fear that a second edition of his poems, similar to the first, might not be received by the critics with the same favour; and his sensitive spirit shrank from an experience of that kind. Nor is there any wonder that he did not show more confidence in his own powers, when it never occurred to such a high literary authority as Dr. Moore that another edition could be a success on any other terms than those of subscription and a beating up of friends. In the light of all that has transpired since, this timidity seems a little strange. In this respect, however, Moore is not worse

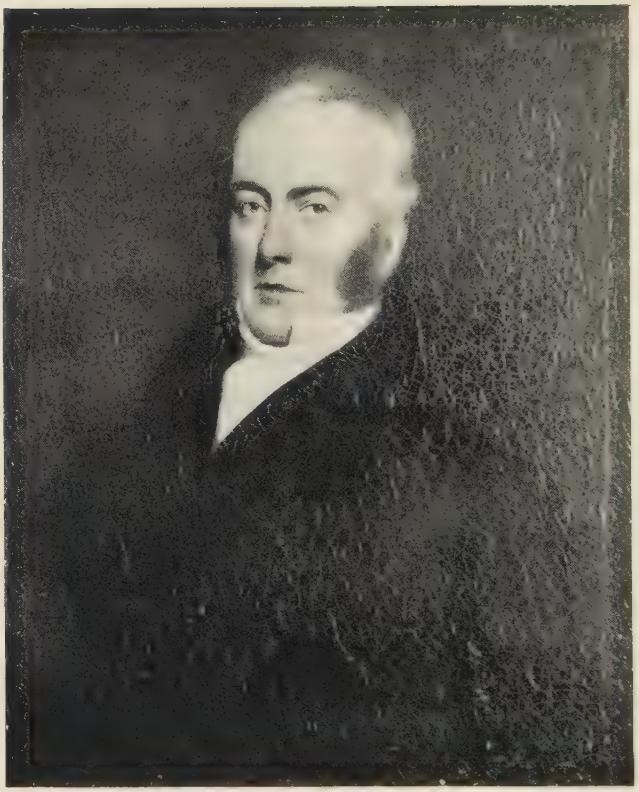
than his contemporaries. It was as difficult for them, with their education and literary canons, to grasp the full significance of Burns's appearance in their midst, as it was for Burns, the victim of his surroundings and education, to realise that his star was destined to kill the light of theirs—that he, being nearer Nature, was inaugurating a new era in literature that would not only be alive and healthy when theirs was as dead as last year's leaves, but would be as modern, aye more so, a hundred years hence, than to-day. And yet he was not without an "inkling" of something of this sort either, if we consider his reply to Mr. Ramsay when that gentleman asked him whether the Edinburgh literati had mended his poems by their criticisms. "Sir," said he, "these gentlemen remind me of some spinsters in my country, who spin their thread so fine that it is neither fit for warp nor woof."

It is not so remarkable, therefore, that, in the highly interesting correspondence which we have been summarising, he never seemed able to forget that he was addressing a very lofty literary personage, whose *Zeluco* and *View of Society and Manners* were as far above his homespun performances as a highly polished and cultivated lady is above a plain rustic maiden; hence he is never familiar, abandoned, or exactly at his ease, though always dignified and frank, as he discusses his literary and other affairs, and present and future projects. He does certainly, and that more than once, claim for himself that he has some poetic ability; and the doctor not only readily admits it, but commends him for his honest avowal and for not exhibiting any mock-modesty. And, as an example of his own saneness in grasping a situation, even in the moment of its most pleasing intoxication, he empha-

sises, as we saw, over and over again, as if its contemplation were a sore point, the fact that he is not to be taken in by all this Edinburgh homage and applause—that it is as a phenomenon more than as a poet that he is a nine days' wonder; and that when this vulgar period of marvelling has come to an end, he will have to go his way back to the rural shades he has so lately emerged from, the great literary and society personages and he, for the most part, bidding farewell to one another.

Dr. Moore, though in the main taking Burns at his own valuation, is not only more than moderately enthusiastic and discriminating in his praise both of the man and the poet, but rejoices at his Edinburgh good fortune; and, like a true friend, exerts himself to promote his interests. It was through him bringing the merits of Burns, as a poet, before Lord Eglinton that his Lordship sent him a subscription of ten guineas for two copies of his next edition. If he takes Burns at his own valuation, he also takes himself at the Poet's estimate, viz., that he is a very superior person, of a very superior literary set, and is, therefore, as lavish (a shade more so, perhaps) of his advice as his praise.

In all this correspondence, however, with its presents and acknowledgments of books and poems, its criticisms and advice and exchanging of views, its confidences and gossip, and its discussions of present and future plans, it never seems to have entered the doctor's mind that the young peasant-poet he was praising, patronising, and advising, was the marvellous genius that posterity has claimed him to be—that he and all his literary tribe, whom Burns, in his great veneration, almost spoke of with bated breath, were to be indebted for their immortality more to contact with the Ayrshire peasant than to their own works.



DR. WILLIAM MAXWELL

From an Oil Painting in the possession of Colonel J. Maxwell Witham, Kirkconnell, Newabbey.

IV.

Drs. MAXWELL, THOMSON, MUNDELL, Etc., DUMFRIES.

Dumfries, in Burns's time, was a somewhat gay and fashionable garrison town, whose officers, together with the county gentry, gave an aristocratic tone to its society. It was famous for the entertainments of the hunting, races, balls, assemblies, and theatre, by the Caledonian and Dumfries and Galloway hunts; and for its convivial dinner and supper parties by the leisured and prosperous burgesses, the well-to-do professional men, and those living in retirement on competencies; the latter, a not inconsiderable class at that period, resident in the pleasant dwelling place by the banks of the Nith.

In politics it was no longer Whig, but rank Tory, and, therefore, eminently, even ostentatiously, loyal to the government of the day. Jacobitism was as good as dead, or only lingered passively in the minds of a few, Burns's and his friend Dr. Maxwell's being among the number. There was, doubtless, a good deal in the Poet's characterisation to account for this kindly leaning; while Maxwell, though possessing similar sympathies to Burns, had a hereditary tendency towards Jacobitism, he being the son of the gallant Kirkconnell Maxwell who went out with Prince Charles in 1745, and became the historian of the expedition.

As an illustration of this blood taint, it is popularly reported of him by Chambers that, while studying at the medical schools in Paris during the heat of the Revolution, he had acted as one of the National Guard round the scaffold of Louis XVI., and had dipped his handkerchief in the royal blood. The truth and falsehood of this romantic little episode are set forth in *A Paper on the Subject of Burns's Pistols*, read before the Society of Scottish Antiquaries, in April, 1859, by the Right Rev. Bishop Gillis, Roman Catholic Bishop of Edinburgh, into whose possession the pistols came through the daughter of Dr. Maxwell.

The Bishop, who knew the doctor and his family well, being a member of the household in Edinburgh to which Maxwell removed from Dumfries in 1834, and under the roof of which he died in October of the same year, readily admits his bias towards Revolutionary principles in his youth, and also his being "present in Paris as one of the National Guard around the scaffold of the virtuous and unfortunate Louis XVI. But," he says, "if for no other reason than because he was at the time under arms; none but he who would cast a general slur on the character of an English gentleman, will believe that 'he then dipped his handkerchief in the royal blood,'—no one, especially who ever enjoyed the privilege of Dr. Maxwell's acquaintance, and had an opportunity of appreciating the high breeding of the man, his exquisite sense of propriety, and the deep and noble feelings of his generous and tender heart, can ever for a moment connect his memory with the perpetration of an act so exclusively within the province of savage brutality." The Bishop further declares that, in after life, he never spoke "of the awful sublimity of the event without the tears welling up

into his eyelids," he having been so close to the scaffold as not only to see the face of the royal martyr, but to hear the words, "*Fils de Saint Louis, Montez au Ciel!*" addressed to him by the Abbé Edgeworth.

Until I read the good Bishop's defence of his friend I had interpreted the act imputed to him, not as one of *savage brutality*, but rather as an exhibition of a rare and beautiful sentimentalism, of the same character as Mark Antony instances when he says :—

> "They would go and kiss dead Caesar's wounds,
> And dip their napkins in his sacred blood ;
> Yea, beg a hair of him for memory ;"

or as Dumas in *Twenty Years After* relates of Athos at the beheading of Charles, "At last he rose, and taking his handkerchief, steeped it in the blood of the martyred king."

However, be this little story fact or fiction, certainly Maxwell, before returning to his own country and commencing in Dumfries to lay the foundations of that medical practice which was by and by to reach a very high professional level, caught the revolutionary spirit which was rampant in Paris in 1793, and ever afterwards retained the impression which it produced on his ardent and youthful mind.

Accordingly he was considered a kind of head centre of the Liberal party in Dumfries ; and both he, and Burns, with Syme, and other Liberals and opponents of the government were in the habit of holding occasional symposia, at which they spoke their minds freely, with locked doors, a circumstance not unlikely to set the popular imagination to work. These democratic tendencies, therefore, together with his other genial and companionable qualities, and his gift of eloquence, you may be sure, greatly commended his friend-

ship to Burns, over whom his masculine intellect, it is said, exerted considerable influence. On the contrary they rendered both Burns and Maxwell objects of distrust to the ultra-loyal Dumfriessians, who held the French Democracy in horror. Now, Burns did not only not deplore the French Revolution, but, in his heart, sympathised with it; and his nature was too open and candid and independent in its character to conceal from the world what he felt on the subject. Indeed, it was his very outspokenness, along with his foolish presentation of cannon to the French nation, that got him into trouble. Nor was his friend Maxwell one whit behind him in his imprudent enthusiasm for liberal principles, which, coupled with his residence in Paris during the early days of the Revolution, brought forth the well-known denouncements of him and his presumed designs, by Burke, in the House of Commons, giving him thereby a permanent place in the political history of the country, as his connection with Burns, as his friend and physician, has conferred upon him a literary one.

But for all their rash words and indiscreet actions, inspired, doubtless, by a love of freedom, and sympathy with the oppressed and down-trodden of whatever country, they were both loyal enough at heart; and when the war broke out between Great Britain and France in 1793 they both, with their friend Syme, joined a volunteer company that was formed in Dumfries for the defence of the fatherland. Burns, indeed, became the laureate of the corps, and by his patriotic verses,

> "Does haughty Gaul invasion threat?
> Then let the louns beware, sir!
> There's wooden walls upon our seas,
> And Volunteers on shore, sir:

The Nith shall run to *Corsinson*,
The *Criffel* sink in *Solway*
Ere we permit a foreign foe
On British ground to rally !
We'll ne'er permit a foreign foe
On British ground to rally ! "

says Lockhart, " did more good service to the government of the country, at a crisis of the darkest alarm and danger, than perhaps any one person of his rank and station, with the exception of Dibdin, had the power or the inclination to render."

One of the few poetical compliments Burns ever paid to the medical faculty is in the form of an epigram to Dr. Maxwell on the recovery from a fever of Miss Jessie Staig, daughter of the Provost of Dumfries, the heroine of the song, *Lovely Young Jessie*, composed about eighteen months before the illness referred to. Writing to Mrs. Dunlop, September, 1794, in sympathetic terms of the indescribable nature of the feelings of parents concerning the well-being of their children, he describes the whole circumstance in detail, which I beg to quote entire, as it contains a warm eulogium on the skill and character of his friend Dr. Maxwell. " I sympathised much," he says, " the other day with a father, a man whom I respect highly. He is a Mr. Staig, the leading man in our Borough. A girl of his, a lovely young creature of sixteen, was given over by the Physician, who openly said she had but few hours to live. A gentleman who also lives in town, and who had studied medicine in the first schools—the Dr. Maxwell whom Burke mentioned in the House of Commons about the affair of the daggers—was at last called in; and his prescriptions, in a few hours,

altered her situation, and have now cured her. Maxwell is my most intimate friend, and one of the first characters I ever met with; but on account of his Politics is rather shunned by some high aristocrats, though his Family and Fortune entitle him to the first circles. I addressed the following epigram to him on the occasion :—

Maxwell, if merit here you crave,
That merit I deny :
You save fair Jessie from the grave !—
An angel could not die ! "

Whatever part his skill played in the recovery of " Lovely Young Jessie," it was of no avail in the case of poor Burns, whom, as all the world knows, he attended in his last illness, with a kindness and assiduity entirely worthy of their warm and close friendship. Nor was Burns unappreciative of his physician's disinterested zeal. " What business," said he to Maxwell one day in a humorous reference to his poverty, " has a physician to waste his time on me? I am a poor pigeon not worth plucking. Alas ! I have not feathers enough upon me to carry me to my grave."

As a further memorial of his gratitude he, on his deathbed, presented the doctor with a pair of pistols—the same which we saw came into Bishop Gillis's possession, and which he afterwards presented to the Society of Antiquaries, 24th January, 1859; also the Poet's youngest child Maxwell, born July 25th, 1796, the day of his father's funeral, and who died 25th April, 1799, was so named as an additional mark of respect for Dr. Maxwell. And, as it turned out, he proved himself quite worthy of so much good feeling. Sharing, as he did, strongly in the interest caused by the death of his illustrious patient, he, with Syme, and Cunninghame of

Edinburgh, entered at once, and with the greatest cordiality, into the project for the benefit of the Poet's family. He also corresponded with Gilbert Burns, who entrusted him with the negotiations for procuring from Mrs. Dunlop his brother's letters for publication. The Poet's eldest son, Robert, while employed in the Stamp Office, Somerset House, London, likewise corresponded with his father's old friend and physician, the terms of which show him to have been, in some respects, a chip off the old block.

It was Maxwell who supplied Currie with the particulars, or rather, want of particulars, as Scott Douglas very pertinently puts it, of the Poet's illness and death; and which information the same excellent authority considers far from satisfactory. A patient's diseases, both in the eye of the law and in medical etiquette, are deemed a sacred confidence between him and his physician; and if this obligation rests with the medical attendant while his patient is still alive, it is surely equally binding upon him after his death. Though Burns's body, as the mere mortal instrument through which mankind could only come to the knowledge of his marvellous lyric music, and even the diseases which silenced it for ever in death, must always have a precious and significant interest for his countrymen, he is surely entitled to the same treatment from the medical profession, in this respect, that the law and good taste allow to commoner mortals.

Now, this is just what Scott Douglas complains that he did not get. There exists evidence to show, he says, that certain particulars were reluctantly confided by Maxwell to Currie, which proves the latter, in commenting upon the errors of Burns, to have been unworthy of such a sacred trust. At the same time, if Currie sinned, it must, we feel,

have been with his head, not his heart; for he was on his guard, he confesses himself, to touch this thing with great tenderness, since touch it he felt it his duty to do. But, it may reasonably be asked, medical man and all as he was, was he qualified to receive Maxwell's confidence at all, or to touch it with the necessary impartiality; for "it should be borne in mind," says Scott Douglas, "that Dr. Currie, in his medical works, took every opportunity to advocate the duty of abstinence from alcoholic liquors?" Perhaps not; generally speaking, such an office, in my experience, would be too great a temptation for the impartiality of any teetotaler, even, I may admit, the kind, sensible, and able Dr. Currie; and so he wrote these thirteen words, "He who suffers the pollution of inebriation, how shall he escape other pollution?" which brought down upon his unfortunate head the righteous censure of Wordsworth and a host of others who saw in them a kind of blasphemy against Burns; and which even the reverse of squeamish Scott Douglas wishes he had omitted, even although the omission might have rendered his picture incomplete. But enough for the present, I shall have to ask you to look a little closer into this and kindred matters when treating more in detail of Dr. Currie's benevolent achievement and the attitude of the critics towards it.

It would have been strange had the skill of the doctor, and he still comparatively young, attending upon such an illustrious and universally lamented patient, remained unchallenged. Certainly (to leave out of account the taste or the justice of such a proceeding), no useful purpose can be served by opening up such an enquiry at this date, for the very sufficient reason that there is neither clinical nor pathological evidence upon which to found a judgment. Still, if only as

an illustration of how doctors (though, in the main, all in agreement on the great question of the Poet's morals,) differ as to the nature of his bodily diseases, it may be worth while glancing for a little at the appendix to a work, written fifty or more years ago, and after Maxwell had been dead some ten years, by

John Thomson, M.D.,

entitled, *Education: Man's Salvation from Crime, Disease, and Starvation.*

He must have been a very singular personage this Dr. Thomson, of whose history a few particulars are to be gleaned from *Notes and Queries*, Sept. and Oct., 1868, which, by throwing some rays of light on the extraordinary statements in the *Vindicatory Appendix* referred to, help us the better towards a correct estimate of their worth. Dr. C. J. Ramage tells us that, "At the death of Burns in 1796, Mr. John Thomson, about sixteen years of age at that time, was usher to Mr. Gray, the Rector of Dumfries Academy, where the eldest son of the Poet was in attendance. The families of Thomson and Burns are said to have been on intimate terms, so much so was this the case that Dr. Thomson told my informant, to whom he was related, that he used to meet Burns between five and six o'clock in summer mornings in Dock Park, rented by Thomson's father, for the purpose of improving his knowledge of the French language, with which Thomson was well acquainted. This intimacy will account for any information he may give regarding the Poet's last moments. Mr. Thomson subsequently became tutor in the family of the celebrated Dr. Gregory, Professor in the University of Edinburgh, and thereby was able to pursue his medical

studies. He graduated there in June, 1809, and practised for a short time in Deal, and some years after for a short time in Dumfries. He retired to Edinburgh, however, and died there in November, 1847, at the age of sixty-seven."

Another correspondent "F. M. S." had apparently informed the public that Dr. Thomson was the author of an account of Burns's death, which that gentleman had special facilities for forming a correct opinion about; and "C," a third correspondent, writes to say that it "would gratify many lovers of literature if F. M. S. were to publish Dr. Thomson's account of Burns's death. From Dr. Ramage's statement it appears that Dr. Thomson attended the poet in his last illness merely as a friend of the family, not as a medical practitioner. A Mr. Brown, surgeon, and Dr. Maxwell were the medical attendants. The late Joseph Parkes had a note of Burns's, addressed to Mr. Brown, asking for some more medicine, which he irreverently styled 'extreme unction.' Jessie Lewars (Mrs. Thomson) was present at the Poet's death, and she said that Burns, though tortured with rheumatism, was calm and resigned."

F. M. S. replies to C's. request as follows:—"I hardly like to publish Dr. Thomson's description of the state of Burns's mind at the near approach of death, but I may at least say that it is very, very different from the accounts given by the poet's biographers. The gentleman, in whose MSS. I find it was a clergyman, for whose strict and undeviating truthfulness I can personally vouch. He states that having met Dr. Thomson when on a voyage to London by sea, and having long resided in the neighbourhood of many of the scenes immortalised by Burns, he asked Thomson, 'particularly, with a view to have impartial testimony as to the state of Burns's

mind at the near approach of Death.' Thomson, he says, 'solemnly affirmed' the truth of his statement. From Dr. Ramage's obliging note, it appears that although Dr. Thomson was not Burns's medical attendant, he was at least one who must have known the circumstances well."

Now that the special knowledge here hinted at, of which this undeviating and truthful clergyman was the sacred custodian, was something over and above what the doctor himself has revealed in his *Vindicatory Appendix*, I take the liberty to doubt, as the Appendix was written some twenty-four years before the transpiration of the correspondence in *Notes and Queries*, and three years before the doctor's own death. But, granted that all was disclosed in the Appendix that he had to tell, one cannot help asking what wise purpose he intended to serve by writing such a document at all, unless it was simply to let off steam, an operation he had evidently been performing at intervals for the last fifty years. Nor would I be warranted now in resurrecting his nonsense, but, as I said, by way of a little variety, and as an illustration of the proverb that *doctors differ*, if not about the Poet's morals, then about his diseases. Moreover, had this difference of medical opinion been about John Smith's liver it would not have mattered to the world a brass farthing, but the fact that it was about Burns's makes a great alteration.

The doctor's literary style, as shown in his treatise on *Education*, is somewhat Quixotic, going out to challenge all who differ from him in opinion, much as the knight of *La Mancha* went forth to combat with wind-mills, or to the championship of distressed damsels. And yet, on second thoughts, his extravaganza reminds one more of the *Ancient*

Pistol of *Boar's Head* tavern-renown, than the immaculate Spanish gentleman and professor of knight errantry.

He separates education into two divisions, Primation and Maturation, the first being that which we get from the schoolmaster, and the second that which we give ourselves. In the unfolding of his ideas he, in regular swash-buckler style, tilts against everything and everybody—priestcraft, church establishments, women's usurpation of the functions of the lords of creation, Scottish and American notions of the profanation of the Sabbath by railway trains, medical education (hospital and other); commending finally his own *Help-me-up* doctrine as the only genuine panacea for crime, starvation, etc., etc.

In his *Appendix* to this work, which I beg to quote entire on account of its pure Burnsonianism, he, in full view of the approaching festival (held in honour of the sons of Burns at Alloway in 1844), flings down the gauntlet, in true Pistolian terms and spirit, to all in that coming congregation whom it may concern.

"Before sending forth these fugitive pages, I am anxious to say that the word 'help-me-up' is no coinage of mine;—that Scotia's immortal poet, Robert Burns, supplied me with that word. Particular circumstances brought me into very intimate intercourse with him during the closing months of his most eventful life. In youth's 'extatic hour' I enjoyed the ineffable happiness and benefit of his society;—for months I met him almost every morning at five o'clock on the banks of the Nith. My opinion and positive belief that 'man shall progress,' were there and then often discussed, and the channel of progression here briefly described; he called my Help-me-up.

"Reader, permit me to pass from nomenclature to an infinitely more important and holy concern, to vindicate the memory of Robert Burns from the blackest stain which Fame has affixed, diabolically affixed, to his splendid escutcheon. Fame, prompted by priests, yes, countenanced by friends, has promulgated an untruth that Robert Burns died, prematurely died, dissipation's martyr. From personal correct knowledge, I proclaim that Robert Burns died the doctor's martyr; and, as a very few years must sweep away all *living* testimony upon that point, I avail myself of the approaching Festival, and challenge the contradiction of all his living co-temporaries who may there congregate.

"The truth stands thus—The physician of Robert Burns believed that his liver was diseased, and placed him under a course of mercury. In those days a mercurial course was indeed a dreadful alternative. I know well that his mercurial course was extremely severe. In addition to this severity, his physician believed that sea-bathing was the best tonic after salivation. Thus he was sent to the Brow for sea-bathing. In the course of, I think, three weeks he returned home from sea-bathing, inflated, black with dropsy, and soon died. Among the last words I ever heard him speak were, 'Well, the doctor has made a finish of it now.'

"Such I affirm to be the truth. 'Wha then dares battle wi' me?' 'Come forth, thou slanderer.' Robert Burns thus stands forth Maturation's sublimest specimen. Primation had small, very small, claim upon him. I carefully examined his early—I believe the only schoolmaster he ever had—and found that at the age of thirteen he read imperfectly, but had never learned to write. He died Scotia's first poet, extensively acquainted with general literature, an

excellent French scholar, and, what few know, could relish and appreciate the classic odes of Horace. Maturation may indeed triumphantly claim him as her sublimest specimen."

If the belligerent doctor's opinion as to the true condition of Burns's liver is on a par with his statement regarding his proficiency in reading and writing at the age of thirteen, I fear it is of very little value; for Mr. Murdoch, who was not the only schoolmaster, but the first he ever had, seems from his written testimony to hold an entirely contrary view. Besides, what could the opinion of a mere lad of sixteen, without a particle of medical knowledge or experience, even though present at the poet's death-bed, be worth? Nothing at all! He would hear the talk of others at the time, and it was most probably this which got crystallized into a notion of his own when he became possessed of medical knowledge.

But to leave Dr. Thomson, and turn for a little to another medical man,

DR. MUNDELL,

a retired navy surgeon practising in Dumfries, whose intimacy with Burns, though not of so close a character as Maxwell's, rests on something more than his own testimony. In a characteristic letter from Ellisland, dated February, 1790, the Poet writes:—"Dear Doctor.—The bearer, Janet Nievison, is a neighbour, and occasionally a labourer of mine. She has got some complaint in her shoulder, and wants me to find her out a Doctor that will cure her, so I have sent her to you. You will remember that she is just in the jaws of matrimony, so for heaven's sake get her 'hale and sound' as soon as possible. We are all pretty well; only the little boy's sore mouth has again inflamed Mrs. B——'s nipples.—I am, yours,

ROBT. BURNS."

It was he, too, along with Syme and Maxwell, who was invited by the Poet to dine at his house, to meet two honest Midlothian farmers and Jean Lorimer and her father. In writing, January, 1796, to one of these Midlothian friends, Mr. Robert Cleghorn, Saughton Mills, enclosing "The Lassie o' my Heart," just after bare recovery from a rheumatic fever, which he (Burns) says kept him bedfast for many weeks, and brought him to the borders of the grave, he reminds his friend that the bearer of the letter, Mr. Mundell, surgeon, is one of the gentlemen he will remember to have seen at his house. And very likely it was this same Dr. Mundell who, on retiring from professional service in the Royal Navy, started, in company with some other gentlemen, a cotton factory, which flourished for a number of years, till it was injured by the war with America, and whose "ox" the Poet refers to in a letter to the lady of Woodley Park—"There is a species of the human genus that I call the *gin horse-class*; what enviable dogs they are! Round and round, and round they go—Mundell's ox that drives his cotton mill is their exact prototype—without an idea or wish beyond their circle; fat, sleek, stupid, patient, quiet, and contented, while here I sit, altogether Novemberish, a d—mnd melange of fretfulness and melancholy; not enough of the one to rouse me to passion, nor of the other to repose me in torpor; my soul flouncing and fluttering round her tenement, like a wild finch caught amid the horrors of winter, and newly thrust into a cage."

It ought also to be mentioned, in connection with the profession in Dumfries, that it was one of the surgeons of the town, Mr. Archibald Blacklock, who was present at the exhumation of the Poet's remains when the mausoleum was

opened for the interment of his widow in 1834; and that he drew up, in the interest of the science of phrenology, a description of the condition and appearances of the bones of the skull, which were declared to be in a high state of preservation, and of which a plaster of Paris cast was accurately taken after every particle of sand or foreign body had been carefully cleaned and washed away.

Before taking farewell of Burns and the medical profession in and connected with Dumfries, permit me to record a very beautiful reminiscence from Dr. James Finlayson's biography of Dr. Robert Watt, an ex-President of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow, and author of the *Bibliotheca Britannica*, which, for its charming Burns allusion, deserves a niche all to itself in this collection, though Watt was not a doctor at the time, but a young man barely out of his "teens," engaged in making part of the line of road from Sanquhar to Dumfries. On arriving at Dumfries, he was boarded for a few weeks on the farm of Ellisland, in the old house which the Poet and his family had recently occupied. During the summer he spent in Dumfriesshire, he had frequent opportunities of seeing Burns, but cannot recollect of having formed any opinion of him, except a confused idea that he was an extraordinary character. While there, the voracious young book-worm read Burns's poems; and, from an acquaintance with some of his relations, he occasionally got from the Poet's library a reading of other works of the same kind. With these he used to retire into some of the concealed places on the banks of the Nith, and pass his leisure hours in reading, and occasionally in trying his hand in writing rhymes himself. From this period he dates the commencement of his literary pursuits, and who shall say

that Burns's generosity to the young road-maker did not play an important part in it?

Of equal interest, and worthy to be bracketed in this Dumfries leave-taking with the passage of romance in the life of young Watt, is an incident in which another medical man,

Dr. Samuel Hughes, of Hereford,

has secured immortality through contact with Burns. When or where the doctor first made the acquaintance of the Poet it were difficult to say, but, as he graduated at Edinburgh in 1795, it is not improbable that he may have known him while prosecuting his medical studies there, which was also the period when Burns was undergoing his lionising in the Scottish capital. Whether or not, however, he had been intimate with him in Edinburgh, we know for a certainty from the doctor's own testimony, written on a blank portion of a manuscript copy of "Bruce's Address to his Troops at Bannockburn" presented to him by the author in his own handwriting, that he met Burns in Dumfries in the autumn of 1795. Dr. Hughes' own words are, "a beautiful poem given me by the author, Mr. Burns, the celebrated Scottish Poet when at Dumfries, Saty., Augt. 8th, 1795.

S. H."

Written again, immediately below this, is the following, in the handwriting of his daughter-in-law: "Given to my father-in-law, Dr. Hughes of Hereford, by Burns.

Barbara Hughes."

This manuscript, which is now the property of the Municipal Museum of Edinburgh, having been presented to it by Mr. John Kennedy of New York, 29th July, 1890, has accom-

panying the poem, on the same sheet of paper, and also in Burns's handwriting, a short prose account of the historic circumstances upon which the song was founded. The Poet's reason, doubtless, for accompanying the verses with an explanatory historical sketch, being, that the medical gentleman to whom he was presenting it, was an Englishman, and might, therefore, not be supposed to be too conversant with Scottish history.

Dr. Hughes subsequently settled in the city of Hereford, where he was a capable and highly respected physician during the greater part of the first half of the present century, and where, as early as 1812, he was chosen to fill the distinguished position of Mayor, when he gave a banquet to one hundred and thirty of the citizens and neighbours, including the Bishop of the Diocese, the Dean of Hereford, and the nobility, gentry, and clergy, at which, it is recorded "mirth, festivity, and good humour, continued to enliven the hospitable board till a late hour."

JAMES CURRIE, M.D., F.R.S

V.

JAMES CURRIE, M.D., F.R.S., LIVERPOOL,

Whom Carlyle calls Burns's first and kindest biographer, was, like the seer of Chelsea himself, a native of Annandale, Dumfriesshire, and settled in active practice as a physician in the city of Liverpool at the period of the Poet's death. He was, not only a distinguished member of his own profession, being a pioneer in thermometry and the treatment of fever by cold affusion, and the author of numerous papers on medico-philosophical subjects read before the learned societies of Liverpool and Manchester, but he was in the forefront of every good work which had for its object the amelioration of the sick and unfortunate poor, and the social, intellectual, and moral improvement of his adopted fellow-citizens. He was a liberal in politics, of the rational and moderate type, and a staunch advocate for the abolition of slavery. He also enjoyed a somewhat dubious fame as the supposed author of *Jasper Wilson's Letter to Mr. Pitt*, a pamphlet in which the war, in connection with the French Revolution, was deprecated with an eloquence and energy far from pleasing to the government; and which produced an extraordinary sensation on its first publication, three editions being sold in London in two months (not to mention others which were published in Scotland and Ireland), besides being copied into the periodical publications of America, and translated into the languages of Germany and France. He was, moreover, possessed of de-

cided literary ambition; his tastes and talents in this direction bringing him into intimacy with the well-known biographer of the *Lorenzo de Medici*, Mr. William Roscoe. "Few strangers of eminence," says Dr. Currie's son, "arrived at Liverpool without an introduction to Mr. Roscoe and Dr. Currie; and their houses were the resort of men of learning and ability from all quarters."

Dr. Currie was, therefore, as may be readily understood, a great admirer of his fellow countryman's poems, a volume of which he had received so long ago as 1787 from Dr. Moore, the well-known author of *Zeluco;* and his interest in which was, doubtless, enhanced by the fact that he had a casual interview with their author in Dumfries in 1792. Accordingly, on hearing of Burns's death, he opened up a lengthy and protracted correspondence with his old college friend, Mr. John Syme of Ryedale (whom we saw was engaged with Dr. Maxwell of Dumfries and Cunninghame of Edinburgh in raising a subscription for the benefit of the widow and family), inquiring, among other things, what he died of, as a report was going about that it was from the effects of habitual drinking? He also expressed a strong interest in the intended subscription, and in the preparation of a *Life* and an edition of the posthumous works of the Poet, in such terms as amounted to an offer of his own literary assistance to any extent that might be desired. Within a month he had himself collected in Liverpool forty or fifty guineas towards the relief fund, but before the list was closed he managed to bring it up to seventy guineas.

There appears to have been some uncertainty at first as to the selection of an editor and biographer. Professor Dugald Stewart was thought of. So was Mrs. Walter Riddell. Dr.

Currie, who discountenanced the idea of the lady of Woodley Park engaging in such an enterprise, pressed Syme to take the matter up. Indeed, he gives as one of the chief reasons for offering his own services—that, setting aside the disadvantage of little personal acquaintance, it seemed to him that he was fitter for the task than a lively female, who, though she might feel the brilliancy, might not be able to sustain the force or support the weight, of his character. In the end, however, after much epistolary debating for and against the propriety of Dr. Currie taking the affair in hand; and in which, it must be confessed, prompted, doubtless, by literary ambition, as well as an honest desire to serve the widow and her family, is revealed on the doctor's part a distinct hankering after the task, it was, at the earnest solicitation of Mrs. Dunlop and other friends of the Poet, finally agreed in September that he should discharge the onerous duty himself.

Without fee or reward, then, and out of pure love for the theme, if the honourable gratification of literary ambition be excluded, this kind-hearted physician undertook the task, because nobody else among the Poet's many literary friends could be got to do it, "men of established reputation," he tells us in his dedication, "naturally declining an undertaking, to the performance of which it was scarcely to be hoped that general approbation could be obtained, by any exertion of judgment or temper." He undertook it, moreover, at a time when he was over head and ears in a large and lucrative practice, and when he was busy preparing for the press a medical work, embodying his views and researches on the chief professional employment of his life—the treatment of fever by cold affusion, and might, therefore, well have excused himself. Besides, his health was anything but robust, four

of his seven sisters having died of consumption, inherited from their mother. He knew the fatal family tendency was in his own constitution, and he had not only to be watchful, but to absent himself from his practice for brief periods every now and then, in order to prevent a breakdown, or to recover from the effects of an alarming illness. In spite of all precautions and care, however, the much-dreaded malady ultimately developed, and, together with heart disease, carried him off at the early age of forty-nine, his immense labours as the editor and biographer of Burns, it is said, greatly accelerating the sad event.

Some conception of the Herculean nature of the task he undertook may be gathered from his own words, on receiving, in February, 1797, from his friend Syme the mass of materials, letters, fugitive poems, etc., which he had been busy collecting for the last two or three months. "I received," he says, "the huge and shapeless mass with astonishment! Instead of finding, as I expected, a selection of his papers with such annotations as might clear up obscurities—of papers perused and approved of by his friends as fit for publication, or furnishing the materials of publication—I received the complete sweepings of his drawers and of his desk (as it appeared to me), even to the copy-book on which his little boy had been practising his writing. No one had given these papers a perusal, or even an inspection: the sheep were not separated from the goats; and—what has, perhaps, not happened before since the beginning of the world—the manuscripts of a man of genius, unarranged by himself, and unexamined by his family or friends, were sent, with all their sins on their heads to meet the eye of an entire stranger."

Overwhelmed by the hugeness of a task, the materials of

which were so scattered and peculiar, and depending so much for the success of the enterprise on the taste, the delicacy, and the judgment with which they were handled, there is little wonder if he declares to Syme that, "in this situation you will not be surprised that I feel an anxious wish to decline the undertaking, if any other person can be found to engage in it."

Negotiations, moreover, of a peculiarly delicate character, had to be conducted with various persons in possession of documentary material necessary to satisfactorily complete the publication. Mrs. Dunlop, as the result of these deliberations, gave up her letters in exchange for her own to Burns: Clarinda kept hers, but promised to transcribe and transmit passages from them, provided her own to Burns were returned: while Thomson readily parted with the sixty songs Burns had sent him for his *Melodies of Scotland;* also the valuable and delightfully spontaneous correspondence which passed between them anent the same.

Currie was engaged in arranging and editing this miscellaneous mass of materials, and in writing the *Life*, for over a period of three years; and the only assistance he received was when, under a threat of flinging the whole thing up, Gilbert Burns and Syme came down to Liverpool and stayed a fortnight under the doctor's roof. It was in the summer of 1800 that the work, in four volumes, at last appeared. Two thousand copies were printed at 31s. 6d. each, which realised £1,400—for the benefit of the Poet's family. Its appearance was greeted with universal favour, for the tact and delicacy, and the skill and discretion with which, under difficult circumstances, he had accomplished his task. At least, nothing to the contrary ever reached his ear, and he died some five

years after at Sidmouth, whither he had travelled from Bath, under the grateful impression that his benevolent exertions had been crowned with entire success. A year before his death, while searching for health at Moffat, he called at Dumfries to see Mrs. Burns, and, with characteristic unselfishness, selected a single volume out of the Poet's library, as a memorial of his exertions on behalf of herself and family.

Though Currie died in blissful ignorance of any serious adverse criticism of his benevolent achievement, he had probably too much common-sense not to know that posterity might not endorse the same favourable view of his performance, as his friends and contemporaries had done; the particular form and extent that such adverse criticism might take he was perhaps not qualified, by virtue of his very limitations, to guess. It never entered into his, or any other person's calculations, that in the coming future the most insignificant detail of the Poet's life would be so treasured and criticised as it has been. Nor was it to be expected that that same posterity, in pronouncing judgment upon Currie, would, in a spirit of extenuation, consider the very exceptional circumstances under which he performed his difficult task. In a business of this kind it was perhaps not right that it should. At anyrate, as a matter of fact, it didn't. In the long interval that has elapsed since the beginning of the present century numerous indictments have, from time to time, been brought against him. The most serious are his unnecessary candour about the faults of Burns—his apologetic treatment of his character—and his deliberate suppression and alteration of questionable passages and dates in his poems and letters; though, in this connection, it must be borne in mind that he points out, in one of his communications to Syme, that "not

one of the copies of his own (Burns's) letters is dated; and, therefore, a stranger cannot arrange them in the order of time, so as to make them convey a history of his mind." But, even before the work was half through the press, there were murmurs from unexpected quarters, unheard, doubtless, by Currie, but destined to reach the ear of the world by and by. Both Lamb and Wordsworth, especially the latter, as I shall have occasion to show a little further on, felt very sore on the point of Currie's over-righteous treatment of his theme. The former, in writing to Coleridge, August or September, 1800, asks, "Have you seen the new edition of Burns—his posthumous works and letters? I have only been able to procure the first volume, which contains his life—very confusedly and badly written, and interspersed with dull pathological and medical discussions. It is written by a Dr. Currie. Do you know the well-meaning doctor? Alas! *ne sutor ultra crepidam.*"

There is, it must be confessed, a good deal of truth in the witty Elia's description of the life, and it is very clever of him to hit the "well-meaning doctor" with a weapon out of the Aesculapian armoury. You have but to run over the different departments, and their arrangement, in the life, to see how pat the words, "dull pathological and medical discussions" are as applied to them.

1st. It opens with a prefatory essay on the character and condition of the Scottish peasantry, that the reader, and particularly the English, may the better understand the Poet's life, surroundings, and work.

2nd. The Poet's own autobiographical letter to Dr. Moore.

3rd. His brother Gilbert's narrative.

4th. His teacher, Mr. Murdoch's narrative.

5th. Comparative examination of these different narratives, with other particulars of his Ayrshire life, by the editor.

6th. Professor Dugald Stewart's narrative.

7th. Other particulars of his Edinburgh life, including notes of his tour through the South of Scotland.

8th. Dr. Adair's account of his tour with Burns to Stirling, Vale of Devon, Clackmannan, and Dunfermline.

9th. His Highland tour with Mr. Nicol.

10th. Other incidents of his Edinburgh life previous to going to Ellisland.

11th. His Dumfries life to his death.

12th. His character—reflections on. An examination of the poetic temperament—its incompatibilities with the more practical aspect of life. Sensibility—genius, the possessors of them generally strangers to true tranquility and happiness unless kept right by the regular exertion of all the faculties of body and mind; hence the peculiar temptations and dangers to which the poetic constitution is liable, as opium in the East, and alcohol in Western Europe and Great Britain.

13th. Memoir respecting Burns, by a lady—Maria Riddell.

14th. An inquiry into his literary merits, preceded by a survey of the state of letters, particularly Scottish, anterior to Burns—from Dunbar to Ramsay and Fergusson.

15th. The lyric productions of Burns, prefaced by an inquiry into the history and philosophy of the song and ballad in general.

In spite of Elia's strictures and fun, perhaps the dull pathological and medical-discussion method was the only one open to Currie? At anyrate, I am not sure that he did not do the best thing for Burns by this method. And, whatever

its defects in form and structure, suggesting, it may be, to the reader some feeling of confusion and want of literary unity, it has certainly the merit of fulness and thoroughness; while the learned culture it displays, the critical discrimination, the wide and varied knowledge of human character, the sound common-sense, the high purpose, and even the exceedingly competent literary expression, are a more than sufficient refutation of the fitness of the proverb, *ne sutor ultra crepidam*, which Lamb applied to the well-meaning doctor's particular case.

But let us leave Elia, who is speaking as much in his reputed character of humourist, and, therefore, of exaggeration, as serious critic, and come to the heavier metal of Wordsworth. It would be some nine years after Currie's death, and fourteen after the publication of his edition of Burns's works, that the publishers, anxious to maintain, on the expiry of the copyright, a preference in the market for their own impressions, bethought them of an edition with notes and emendations by the Poet's surviving brother, Gilbert. He very willingly fell in with the idea, more particularly, since he had now been convinced by two of his brother's surviving intimates, Mr. Gray of the Dumfries Academy, the teacher of the Poet's children, and Mr. Findlater, his superior officer in the Excise, that Dr. Currie had done injustice to his brother's memory.

It was at this point that Wordsworth took up the cudgels by issuing a pamphlet, in the form of a letter to Mr. Gray, and intended at first for Gilbert's edition, discussing the whole question of the biographer's duty to his subject, especially in regard to the extent to which it was proper to go in laying bare faults and failings. He avowed his indignation at the revelation of the "infirmities" of Burns made

by Dr. Currie, and professed a desire to see this evil corrected. Gilbert, though feeling annoyed at Wordsworth's interference, resolved to follow his suggestion. This action of his brought forth an indignant protest from Mr. Roscoe against the imputation of faults to his friend, Dr. Currie, whose work had been approved of by none more heartily, at its publication, than by Gilbert Burns. Gilbert defended himself by declaring that when Currie's book came out (the proof-sheets of which neither he nor Syme ever saw), he supposed that the biographer had spoken of his brother's errors upon good information, he himself having, for the last few years of the Poet's life, lived fifty miles off, had no opportunity of knowing how the case really stood; he, therefore, approved of Dr. Currie's memoir at the time, but afterwards, from what he had learned from Mr. Findlater, he became convinced that the statements had been exaggerated.

This protest of Mr. Roscoe and defence of Gilbert Burns, led to a most elaborate and protracted correspondence, as is seen from the *Earnock MSS.* in *Annual Burns Chronicle* for 1898, in which Roscoe, in the interest of his friend Dr. Currie's honour, and that of the Currie family, fights most tenaciously for the propriety of leaving things as the doctor left them in his memoir; and in which Gilbert Burns contends as strenuously as it was possible for a man to do, overweighted as he always was by a sense of the greatness of the obligation the Burns family owed to Currie, for the vindication of his brother's honour. At this date, the solicitude of Currie's friends for his honour at the expense of Burns's, seems neither just nor wise. Messrs. Gray and Findlater's evidence, published by Alexander Peterkin in 1814, was already before the world, and the public would

draw their own conclusions whether Gilbert Burns spoke out *boldly*, or allowed himself to be gagged, or his statement whittled down to next to nothing. Mr. Roscoe's attitude, moreover, is all the more remarkable since he admits in one of his letters that the evidence of these two gentlemen might have influenced the final opinion of Dr. Currie.

That the conviction of Gilbert Burns, that Currie's statements had been exaggerated, is the reasonable belief of all at the present day who have taken the trouble to examine this matter for themselves, nobody, I think, will deny. And Dr. Currie, had he lived, would have been the first to honourably atone in some of the subsequent editions for his exaggerations. Wordsworth himself, in his letter to Mr. Gray, admits as much when he says that the author of these objectionable passages, "If he were now alive, would probably be happy to efface them."

But does Dr. Currie deserve the severe censure that has been meted out to him in this affair? It must be borne in mind that he did not belong to that Tennysonian class of biographers who think *they have nothing to do with a poet's wildnesses.* Neither was he of Wordsworth's way of thinking, who considers that a biographer has nothing to do with the private life of a poet, unless he has also been a public man and borne a certain part in the affairs of the world, when such knowledge might then be necessary to explain his public actions. "Nothing of this," he says, "applies to authors, considered merely as authors. Our business is with their books, to understand and to enjoy them. And of poets more especially it is true that, if their works be good, they contain within themselves all that is necessary to their being comprehended and relished."

Burns's *wildnesses*, however, could not have been ignored, even if his biographer had held similar views to those of Tennyson and Wordsworth; they were so much a part of the man, and the man was his poems and songs, in a sense altogether different from either of the cases of the two great artists mentioned, or indeed almost any other poet. Besides, Burns was himself continually drawing attention to them, and sometimes in humorous moods and sometimes out of the depths of remorse, colouring them with the hues of exaggeration, little thinking that he would be taken absolutely at his word, but expecting rather the usual deduction charitably yielded in cases of self-depreciation, whether of poets or commoner mortals.

Now, if Gilbert Burns, who surely knew his own brother better than anybody, and living, as he declared in his defence to Mr. Roscoe, during the last few years of the Poet's life only fifty miles away from him, credited Dr. Currie's statement of his errors, there was surely still greater excuse for Dr. Currie, living five times that distance from him, accepting, as he doubtless thought from reliable and respectable sources, that evidence which formed the substance of his accusations against Burns's character. If he erred, and I think he did, it was in not going further afield for his information, more especially as his own personal knowledge of how the case stood was *nil*. He informs us himself, in a footnote to the *Life*, that Dr. Maxwell furnished him with the particulars of the Poet's last illness and death, and it is not too much to presume that Syme was the chief informant on the subject of his errors. It is, indeed, recorded in black and white that he, in the beginning of the undertaking, questioned Syme on these very points, and he would, doubtless, receive an answer.

Later, again, after the publication of the *Life*, he, in a letter to the same correspondent acknowledging the assistance of his observations in estimating the character of Burns, asks whether he has touched the Bard with a rough or lenient hand, and whether the portrait he has drawn resembles the original, two points on which he seems to feel a certain amount of sensitiveness, like a man not altogether sure of his own action, and, therefore, for his own peace of mind, standing in need of a certificate.

It has been argued that Syme knew Burns well—none better, and loved him too sincerely to give his friend away—all which may be conceded, and yet the wisdom of the biographer questioned who would rely on this one man's evidence alone, though it seemed to confirm a report to the same effect which had reached his ear in Liverpool prior to the Poet's death. But the truth of such an argument, I should think, would depend not so much on the informant's good intention as on his characterisation. He was certainly not without cleverness, and was named, as we saw, among the Poet's possible biographers; but his character was not distinguished for seriousness, and we know he was given somewhat to romancing. As an instance of his loose and unreliable style, he is said to have declared that Burns was "burnt to a cinder" ere Death took him; and Henley, who is unscrupulous enough to lay hold on anything that will work into his unseemly picture of the defamation of the Poet's memory, has seized upon this phrase to demonstrate "that Burns had damaged himself with drink." Now, this is not a scientific phrase: it is simply a figure of speech; and if it means anything definite at all, it might as well signify that, as a spiritual force, he was burnt out—that he had

lived too fast in an intellectual and emotional sense, and so was an extinct force. It would be going out of any unbiased critic's way to interpret the words as conveying, from him, a layman, at least, the idea of atrophy of certain internal organs through the burning effects of alcohol. Besides, Syme was the last man that should have talked as Henley interprets him to have done. I suppose he did as much drinking, if not more, than Burns; and he was the older man, and should have protected him against excesses, and not encouraged him, as we know he did, if he recognised the value of his life to the nation.

Perhaps, too, Currie should have known, as a student of human nature and as a man of the world, that there is a disposition, even among well-meaning friends, to exaggerate the drinking propensities of a man of genius, as conferring an additional glorification to the sum of his achievements, just as vulgar people, to whom the marvellous and wonderful appeal strongly, are prone to associate extraordinary cleverness with excessive drunkenness, thereby giving it the character of a dogma of every-day life. What part the doctor's own bias in the direction of temperance doctrines may have played in the matter it is impossible to say, but, judging from his own words, he seems to have been alive to such temptation in striving to do the right. Wordsworth wonders how the affecting passage, where the poet himself pleads for those who have transgressed :—

> " One point must still be greatly dark,
> The moving *why* they do it,
> And just as lamely can ye mark
> How far, perhaps, they rue it.

Who made the heart, 'tis *he* alone
Decidedly can try us ;
He knows each chord—its various tone,
Each spring, its various bias.

Then at the balance let's be mute,
We never can adjust it ;
What's done we partly may compute,
But know not what's *resisted.*"

Wordsworth wonders how the recollection of this affecting passage "did not check so amiable a man as Dr. Currie, while he was revealing to the world the infirmities of its author." He seems, however, to have had just such a guard on himself, from the following words. "It is, indeed," he says, "a duty we owe to the living, not to allow our admiration of great genius, or even our pity for its unhappy destiny, to conceal or disguise its errors. But there are sentiments of respect, and even tenderness, with which this duty should be performed ; there is an awful sanctity which invests the mansions of the dead ; and let those who moralise over the graves of their contemporaries, reflect with humility on their own errors, nor forget how soon they may themselves require the candour and sympathy they are called upon to bestow." It must be conceded, I think, that a biographer, working in the spirit of this solemn ideal, if he trespass against his subject's memory, must do it more from mistaken duty than from malice. Besides, Currie felt that if he did not touch this matter, which he believed was of such a clamant character, somebody else would, and not so tenderly or so kindly.

Lockhart, in traversing this knotty part of the Burns problem, considers that the truth may probably be found to lie between Currie's statement and those of Messrs. Gray and

Findlater, as something ought perhaps to be deducted from the latter on the score of personal friendship. But, it might be asked, may there not be another, simpler, and even more reliable way of arriving at an opinion; and the wonder is that Currie did not think of it, only it was perhaps too soon? Is it necessary to found a judgment at all on hearsay evidence, however authoritative and respectable, in a grave matter of this kind? It has always seemed to me that, during the last four years of the Poet's life in Dumfries, against which the charge of excessive indulgence in alcohol is mainly brought, he had no time for excessive drinking, far less for recovering from its effects, which he would have required to have done before being capable of renewed intellectual effort. And we know that he was not a good drinker. He confessed to Professor Dugald Stewart that there was no merit in his abstinence, as he had to pay too dearly for the slightest indulgence. The habitual drunkard is, as a rule, incapable of any serious work, good or bad: even the periodical "boozer" relinquishes all labour till he has done with his "booze" and fairly recovered from its effects. Now Burns, besides performing his Excise duties, which we now know for a fact he did very well, wrote some one hundred and fifty pieces of verse. With the exception of a few odd sonnets, epigrams, monodies, ballads, theatrical addresses, and rhyming epistles, they were nearly all songs—his very best too. "And only the man," says a writer in the *Glasgow Herald* for Jan. 29, 1898, "who has attempted to follow him through the songs which he read and refined can understand the severity of his labours—labours to which the throwing off of such extraordinary pieces of the nature of a *tour de force* as 'Tam O' Shanter' or 'The Jolly Beggars' was a trifle, because it was really an exquisite pleasure." He

also wrote some one hundred and thirty letters, including the fifty-six to George Thomson in connection with the songs he was sending him for his *Musical Melodies*—letters too, which, for distinct literary quality, were even more of a marvel to some of the Edinburgh *literati* than his verse. He corrected, moreover, the proof sheets of two different publications—*Johnson's Museum*, and a two-volume edition of his poems. And he did all this at his very highest literary water-mark, and with not the remotest hint of the drunkard in a single line, or even word, during the brief space of four years, while struggling with honest poverty, and while discharging the duties of a volunteer, regularly attending masonic meetings, and generally taking part in those festivities and social and public functions which his fame had imposed on his citizenship; and while, like his worthy father before him, superintending the education of his children, and building up their character by conversation and selected readings from the English classics.

This four years record of work, which must surely have swallowed up the greater part of his leisure, and left a very small margin for indulgence in those excesses to which Currie is blamed for giving a too ready credence, is all the more remarkable when his indifferent health, during a considerable part of the time, is taken into account. For upwards of a year before his death—from early summer of 1795—his health began to give way. This, however, was not the first of his illness; for in a letter to Mrs. Dunlop, June 25, 1794, speaking of his poor health, he says:—"My medical friends threaten me with a flying gout, but I trust they are mistaken." In the autumn of that same year, 1795, he was so greatly prostrated by the death of his little girl at Mauchline, whose

burial he was too unwell to attend, that he was compelled to abandon all literary work for a time. This is also the period of the story of the *accidental complaint*—from October, 1795, till January following—which Currie states he was confined with, but which Burns himself indignantly denied when his friend Crombie, shortly before his death, inquired of him as to its truth. In commenting on this *accidental complaint* story, Mr. William Wallace, editor of the new Chambers' edition, says:—"Currie undoubtedly deserves censure for having made, in public, charges against the moral character of Burns, which, from their nature, can only be discussed *in camera*." The same distinguished Burns scholar and trenchant critic considers further that Currie, in virtue of the exaggerated view he took of the Poet's errors, did not give him sufficient credit for honestly struggling to overcome his faults and do well. In harping, as he did, on the weakness of his will he forgot to make allowance for the strength of his passions. Mr. Wallace inclines rather to hold with Carlyle—that he had an *iron resolution*, and believes that, had death not cut him off prematurely, or accidentally for that matter, for we have no medical statement of authority, or even at all, as to the possibilities of prolonged life that were in him, the chances were in favour of his resolution, in the very exercise of a continual strife to do well, being ultimately rewarded with victory.

I am reminded here, in the mention of the name of Carlyle, that his strictures, which proceed on somewhat different lines from those of the others, have still to be considered. They don't deal so much with Dr. Currie's mistakes and errors of judgment in treating of his subject, as with the larger question of capacity for a great and distinguished treatment of

the subject. While acknowledging that "Currie loved the Poet truly, more perhaps than he avowed to his readers, or even to himself, he objects to his "everywhere introducing him with a certain patronising and apologetic air, as if the polite public might think it strange and half unwarrantable that he, a man of science, a scholar and gentleman, should do such honour to a rustic. In all this, however, we readily admit that his fault was not want of love, but weakness of faith, and regret that the first and kindest of all our Poet's biographers should not have seen further, or believed more boldly what he saw."

Now, it is all very well for Carlyle to blame Currie for *weakness of faith*—for lack of prophetic vision; in which he was no greater a sinner than his contemporaries; but he forgets that he performed his task immediately after the Poet's death, which is altogether another matter. Nathaniel Hawthorne, America's greatest man of letters, in *Our Old Home*, says, and says very truly, in discussing this very subject, "It is far easier to know and honour a poet when his fame has taken shape in spotlessness of marble, than when the actual man comes staggering before you, besmeared with the sordid stains of his daily life. For my part, I chiefly wonder that his recognition dawned so brightly while he was still living. There must have been something very grand in his immediate presence, some strangely impressive characteristic in his natural behaviour to have caused him to seem like a demigod so soon."

It was, however, quite another affair when Carlyle himself came to write his essay, which, for general grasp, keenness of insight, tenderness, generosity, daringness, and even righteousness, is still the greatest treatment of the theme, and could

gauge a truer opinion, and recognise that the peasant bard, in his lifetime, was, not only a true British poet, but "one of the most considerable British men of the eighteenth century." Moreover, Carlyle and other adverse critics overlook the very important fact that the task Currie, like a shrewd sensible man, set before himself, was to write a life and edit an edition of the Poet's works ostensibly for the benefit of his widow and orphan children. It was the immediate success of the present that perplexed and stimulated him more than the verdict (praise or blame) of the future. He, therefore, felt it his duty to publish nothing to the world that would jeopardise in the slightest that project, hence his suppressions and alterations of text and his tamperings with dates, which have brought down on his unlucky memory, especially of late years, the heavy censure of the critics. I would even include within the scope of this same category those deliberate alterations of the dates of the letters of his relative, Mrs. Dunlop, to Burns during his latter years, in order to conceal from the public that that lady withdrew from him her friendship for a time; which, I think, unpardonable action, on Currie's part, might be read as much in the light of a mistaken kindness to Burns as towards his own relative.

He was also of opinion that more was to be gained from that public, to which he was appealing, than lost by stating, with the utmost kindness and discretion he could command, what he considered to be the truth about the Poet's declensions, which, he believed, from the most trustworthy information supplied to him, were of such a nature that they could not be ignored; and that, if he did not touch them, somebody else would, with a far unkinder hand.

JAMES CURRIE, M.D., F.R.S.

Looked at in this light, then, which, after all, is the only fair one, Dr. Currie did his work very well, like an honest Burns worshipper; and the Burns world owe him a signal debt of gratitude; for, much as has been written on the theme since, it is marvellous how very little past his very thorough performance we have really got, or can get.

Medical Subscribers to Currie's First Edition, 1800.

Adair, J. M., M.D., Harrogate.
Biddoes, Dr., Bristol.
Bostock, John, M.D., Liverpool.
Cairncross, And., Esq., Surgeon, London.
Caldwell, Robt., Esq., Surgeon, 6th Fencible Regiment.
Carson, William, M.D., Birmingham.
Charles, George, Esq., M.D., Ayr.
Clark, Robt., M.D., Dublin.
Clark, James, Esq., Surgeon.
Crompton, Peter, M.D., Eton House, near Liverpool.
Currie, William, M.D., Chester.
Currie, James, M.D., F.R.S., Liverpool.
Elliot, Mr. Thos., Surgeon, London.
Goldie, Mr. Joseph, Surgeon, Liverpool.
Graham, Thos., Esq., Surgeon, Royal Navy.
Home, Dr. James, Professor, Edinburgh.
McIntosh, Dr. William, late of Jamaica.
Millar, Dr. Richard, Glasgow.
Moore, John, M.D., Clifford Street, London.
Morris, Dr. Hugh, Glasgow.
Percival, Thos., M.D., F.R.S., Manchester.
Rattray, Dr., Coventry.

SAUMAREZ, Mr., Surgeon, Newington Butts.
SMALL, Dr., Dundee.
TAIT, Dr. WILLIAM, Edinburgh.
TAYLOR, Dr., Manchester.
TOWERS, Mr. JAMES, Surgeon.
URIE, Mr. ARCHD., Assistant Surgeon, 58th Regiment.
WOOD, ALEXR., Esq., Surgeon.

DAVID MACBETH MOIR, M.D.
(DELTA)
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VI.

DR. DAVID MACBETH MOIR (Delta),

AND THE GRAND ALLOWAY FESTIVAL.

In the long interval of forty-four years, between the publication of Currie's edition of the *Life and Posthumous Works of Burns*, in 1800, and the holding of the Grand Alloway Festival in 1844, there were issued from the press upwards of two hundred different editions, including some French and German translations. During that interval there also appeared numerous other collateral publications treating of the Burns theme. Only a few, however—the productions of medical men—require a passing notice in this collection.

Robert John Thornton, M.D., London,

(the son of a member of the medical profession, and well-known wit, humourist, and man of letters, who died in 1768, when the subject of the present sketch was quite a child), was also, like his father, possessed of extensive literary acquirements. He was the author of a work, notable in its day, on *The Philosophy of Medicine*, published in 1798, in four volumes. He also wrote *The Philosophy of Politics*, published a year later, in three volumes. And early in his career he ruined himself in a gigantic literary speculation—the publication in 1799–1804 of a work of extraordinary size on Botany (a science to which he was, from his youth, passionately devoted,

and upon which he wrote voluminously), entitled, *The Temple of Flora; or, Garden of the Botanist, Poet, Painter, and Philosopher;* with plates very splendidly coloured after nature by celebrated artists.

In addition to all this scientific literary activity, he found time, in his busy practice, and amid that poverty, which his devotion to Botany had brought down upon his luckless head, to tread, for once at least, the flowerier paths of literature. I refer to that little treatise he wrote, which is his justification to a notice in this inquiry, entitled *A School Virgil*, London, 1813, and *Illustrations* to the same, London, 1814; and which is a kindly, sympathetic, and appreciative notice of Burns; with severe reflections on George Thomson. These reflections, however, especially in the light of Mr. Hadden's recent biography of Thomson, are now understood to be quite unfounded.

W. AINSLIE, M.D.,

is the author of the following lines, written on seeing Mr. Thom's sculpture of Tam o' Shanter and Souter Johnny, which appeared in the *Morning Post*, 1829:—

"That the great bard—what need to tell the name?—
In after times, should still more mighty be,
At Heaven's command, behold a *Garrick* came,
And both were crowned with immortality!

So to the earth, in these our later days,
Was Thom, with his soul-breathing chisel, sent;
That Burns, enwreath'd in everlasting bays,
Might speak again in living adamant."

R. R. Madden, M.D.,

a native of Ireland, was educated in Dublin, and after studying medicine in Paris, Naples, and London, travelled for some years in the East. Returning to England, he practised for a time as a surgeon in Curzon Street, Mayfair. Afterwards, in 1833, he went out to Jamaica as one of the special magistrates appointed to administer the statute abolishing slavery in the plantations, but, getting into trouble, he took a tour to America. He also visited Africa and Western Australia in public and official capacities; and in 1848 he returned to Ireland, where he died in 1886.

Dr. Madden was a true Irish patriot, a man of affairs, a journalist, a medical practitioner, and a most extensive miscellaneous writer; being, among numberless other publications, the author of *Life and Martyrdom of Savonarola*, *Travels in Turkey*, *The Musselman* (a novel), *Literary Life and Correspondence of the Countess Blessington*, and *The Infirmities of Genius*, illustrated by referring the anomalies in the Literary Character to the Habits and Constitutional Peculiarities of Men of Genius, London, Saunders and Otley, 1833. This latter work, written when practising medicine in Mayfair, and before going out to Jamaica, contains a chapter, the twenty-first, on Burns.

As was to be expected, in view of such a title as *The Infirmities of Genius*, the doctor, in this Burns essay, deals solely with the poet—the man, and not with his poetry; and if he does so in a more or less scientific spirit, it is neither narrow, unkindly, nor unsympathetic. It is questionable, indeed, how far, if at all, he knows the poems of Burns; and he appears to have come by his knowledge of the man chiefly

from Dr. Currie's biography of the Poet, which he quotes largely and approvingly. He is not of Lamb's opinion, that it is *very confusedly and badly written, and interspersed with dull pathological and medical discussions.* He holds rather that it deserves to be considered one of the best specimens of biography in the English language, not only for the philosophical spirit in which it is written, but for its noble effort to vindicate the character of genius.

Dr. Madden is inclined to lay the blame of Burns's errors at the door of his dyspepsia—the literary malady, which he traces as present in his constitution from his earliest days, and which, doubtless, was responsible for his hypochondriacal melancholy, his nervous headaches, his palpitations and sinkings of the heart, etc., etc. The dejection consequent on this hypochondria, in his early years, he points out, was soothed by the excitement of the tender passion. In later life he employed other means to alleviate it—alcohol, which had the dangerous effect of aggravating the disease. He quotes Currie as to the fatal defects in his character consisting in his comparative weakness of volition and in the acuteness and strength of his sensibility; while the occupations of a poet are as little calculated, in the one case, to strengthen the governing powers of the mind, as they are, in the other, to weaken that sensibility which requires perpetual control; which deliverance he characterises as worth all that has ever been said on "the poetic temperament." "Indolence," again, "the baneful attendant of morbid sensibility," he considers, and I cannot help thinking in culpable ignorance of the amount of genuine work Burns did during the very years in question, as I tried to show in the preceding chapter —Idleness he considers the next factor in the production of

that train of symptoms which heralded a premature death, as it aggravated his hypochondria, for the relief of which he had recourse to the seductive use of stimulants, which had to be increased to meet the failing strength of body, and consequently of volition, and the proportionate increase of sensibility caused by the soothing and gratification of the diseased sensations.

Speaking of the Poet's last rheumatic illness, which had so shattered his already enfeebled constitution, the doctor has some significant observations. "In June he was recommended to go into the country; 'and impatient of advice,' says his biographer, 'as well as of every species of control, he determined for himself to try the effects of bathing in the sea.' Burns, however, distinctly says in two of his letters, this extraordinary remedy for rheumatism was prescribed by his physician; 'The medical men,' he wrote to Mr. Cunningham, 'tell me that my last and only chance is bathing and country quarters, and riding.' For the sake of the faculty, I trust that Burns was mistaken in the matter, for no medical man of common-sense could think that a patient sinking under rheumatism, and shattered in constitution, was a fit subject for so violent a remedy as the cold bath. No medical man can consider, without shuddering, the mischief it must have produced in the case of Burns."

In spite of the fact of the remarkable fruitfulness of the press in the multiplication of new editions and other collateral Burnsiana matters during these forty-four years, the Scottish nation may, nevertheless, be said, generally, to have regarded its Poet with a feeling of apathy since laying him with so much pompous ceremonial in the churchyard

of St. Michael. And the Grand Festival held in honour of his sons, at their father's birthplace, may be described as, not only the first symptoms of an awakening from its unworthy attitude of indifference, but the dawn of a new state of things, out of which was to emerge the materials for the building up of a progressive Burns cult, and the founding of a real, salutary hero-worship.

Lord Eglinton presided on the eventful occasion; and there were present such notabilities as Henry Glassford Bell, Esq., Sheriff Substitute of Lanarkshire, Professor Wilson of Edinburgh (Christopher North), Archibald Alison, Esq., Sheriff of Lanarkshire, and author of the *History of Europe*, Colonel Mure of Caldwell, author of *Travels in Greece*, William Ayton, Esq., Advocate, and a whole host of others, more or less celebrated in war, diplomacy, the senate, public life, and at the bar. There was, however, among the distinguished company, one celebrity, specially invited to attend, though not in evidence. I refer to

DR. DAVID MACBETH MOIR, OF MUSSELBURGH,

better known by his pen-name Δ (Delta) of *Blackwood*, the friend and intimate of that gifted literary brotherhood, which included Wilson, the Blackwoods, Ferrier, Simpson, Dr. Robert Macnish, Christison, Robert Chambers, Dr. John Brown, and Thomas Aird, his biographer.

Dr. Moir, as is well-known, was a hard-working and most capable medical practitioner all his too brief life, to which his *Outlines of the Ancient History of Medicine*, published in 1831, bear excellent testimony; so also does his heroic attendance, night and day, upon the plague-stricken inhabi-

tants of Musselburgh during that fearful visitation of cholera which swept over Europe at this time; and his *Practical Observations* on the same *malignant* theme, published in 1833, which was followed by *Proofs of its Contagiousness* in 1843. But he was, besides, a most distinguished poet and man of letters, finding time, in the midst of his busy practice, for the gratification of his literary passion, mostly when other folks were busy sleeping. He is, indeed, one of the solitary examples, not only of the compatibility of medicine with letters, but of their entirely successful union in his own remarkable person. Out of a very considerable out-put (at least for one of his busy years), of prose and verse, and all of a highly meritorious character for workmanship and polish, the two works possessing the greatest amount of immortality are, doubtless, his *Mansie Wauch* and *Cassa Wappy*. And if the former has been provocative of more innocent mirth and healthy laughter than perhaps any other work of a similar kind, the latter has contributed towards the shedding of more medicinal tears, by bereaved fathers and mothers, than any other child's poem in the language.

Though Dr. Moir did not take any public part in the day's proceedings at the grand Alloway banquet in 1844, he did perhaps a far greater service to the occasion, and, certainly, to posterity, by composing his *Commemorative Burns Poem*, published in *Blackwood* at the time. In writing to his friend Aird of Dumfries, a month or two thereafter, he says, "My days, and sometimes my nights, are absorbed in professional hurry; and often for a week at a time I cannot answer a single letter—my opportunity for reading at these times being a book in my phaeton. With the exception of the lines to Burns, and another piece, I do not remember another product

of my muse for the last twelve months. *Apropos* of the lines to Burns, they have been popular probably beyond any other thing that I have ever written, and have been republished in fifty different quarters."

And they deserved to be, for his stanzas are not only penned in the genuine spirit of hero-worship, but he writes like a man who knows his subject down to the bottom, as well as all round. The following lines are a good example of his exceeding sanity on that portion of the Burns theme which has proved a stumbling-block to so many of the smaller order of minds, and is a pronouncement distinctly in advance of his own day.

"Judge not ye, whose thoughts are fingers,
Of the hands that witch the lyre—
Greenland has its mountain icebergs,
Ætna has its heart of fire;
Calculation has its plummet;
Self-control its iron rules;
Genius has its sparkling fountains;
Dulness has its stagnant pools;
Like a halcyon on the waters,
Burns's chart disdained a plan—
In his soarings he was Heavenly,
In his sinkings he was man."

It is a singular and noteworthy coincidence that, with a view to recruit his declining health by rest and change of scene, he should have been on a visit, accompanied by his wife and little son, to the land of Burns where he met the illness which was so soon to prove fatal to him. On his return to the inn after a short drive to the cottage where Burns was born and the other objects of interest in that celebrated locality, which he was desirous of showing his wife and son,

he was seized with a violent spasm. The next day he was a little better and determined to return home, taking Dumfries on the way. He, however, never reached Musselburgh; his illness quickly developing into an acute peritonitis after arriving at Dumfries, where he died in a few days, at the age of fifty-three.

VII.

DRS. FR. ADAMS, O. W. HOLMES, Etc.,

AND THE 1859 CELEBRATIONS.

Between the Alloway Festival and the next most important event of the Burns cult—the Centenary Celebration—it falls to me to notice the name of

James R. McConochie, M.D., Louisville, Ky.,

who was the author of a little work, *Leisure Hours*, partly poetical and partly prose, written in the spare moments of his busy professional life, and published in 1848. There is a prose sketch in the little volume, called, *Recollections of Robert Burns*, a subject upon which he considers himself well qualified to speak, being not only a native of Dumfries, where his father was a minister, but educated there, at the same school as Burns's son, both boys sitting on the same form. He remembered the Poet well, and would be some seven or eight years of age when he was first pointed out to him, one evening at the Dock, the general resort of the Dumfriesians at the close of the labours of the day.

The doctor, however, does not tell us anything new concerning Burns. His presentment is the usual stereotyped one, about his great genius, and equally great errors, but appreciative and kindly withal. It could hardly be expected that a

lad of seven years old could have formed any opinion of his own on such a subject. He has, moreover, fallen into a good many mistakes, such as, that Jean Armour's father was a tailor, which render his *Recollections*, especially from the personal point of view, comparatively worthless. Indeed, the likelihood is that he penned them more from reading and the remembrance of hearsay evidence heard fifty or sixty years ago, than from personal *Recollections*.

A tribute of a very different character to the one just recorded is that of a *Lecture*, published in 1858, by

Alexander M. Walker, M.A., M.D.,

on the Private and Literary Life of Burns, which he had, by request, delivered a few years previously, before some of the Metropolitan Literary and Scientific Institutions. In the preface to his lecture he solicits the patronage of the nobility and gentry and tradesmen of the town and vicinity, as the proceeds from the sale of the little publication are to be devoted to the purchase of some of the best standard authors for the library of the *Useful Knowledge Institution*, of which the doctor was honorary secretary.

Two years later again, in 1860, he published a second *Lecture on the Poems and Songs of Burns*, which had also, he informs us in the preface, been previously delivered before the above mentioned Metropolitan Societies; and, in issuing which, he once more solicits the patronage of his neighbours and fellow-townsmen, the proceeds of the sale in the present case being for the benefit of the *Chapel of Ease School*.

The delivery and publication of these two lectures is unique, especially when it is considered that the lecturer was an Irish-

man practising as a physician in a south of England fashionable watering place—Tunbridge Wells. But had he not disclosed his nationality, it could have been easily discovered from his text that he had never been either in Ayrshire or Dumfriesshire, which he speaks of as though they were the highlands of Perthshire. If, however, he was ignorant of the topographical character of these two counties, which were mainly identified with the life and work of Burns, his acquaintanceship with both the spirit and letter of the Poet's *Private and Literary Life*, and with his *Poems and Songs*, is thorough and sound. His first lecture is a most eloquent, enthusiastic, and generous tribute to the character of the Scottish Bard, but thoughtful and discriminating withal, being of opinion, considering his circumstances and the time, that he was fairly well equipped, educationally and otherwise, for the work his hand found to do, because he supplemented what he lacked from the teaching of his schoolmaster and his own father, by the most assiduous self-culture, in order that the product of his art might not suffer through poverty of knowledge, or its expression be unworthy of the theme he was singing through want of cultivation.

His second lecture is an equally able, warm, and scholarly criticism of the *Poems and Songs*, showing, by his comparative analysis, not only fine insight into his subject, but wide culture and knowledge of the world's greatest masters in literature. And, like all the performances of medical men, both lectures are conspicuous for the spirit in which they touch upon the Poet's failings—a spirit which he commends as one of the signal merits of Dr. Currie's memoir.

In the great centennial celebrations of 1859, which produced so many tributes, both at home and abroad, to the

FRANCIS ADAMS, M.D., LL.D.

From Marble Bust in Aberdeen University, by permission of the Principal, Sir W. Geddes.

beloved memory of Scotland's Bard, the medical profession is worthily represented. On the one hand, as far north as Banchory, Kincardineshire,

Francis Adams, M.D., LL.D.,

commemorates the event by a *Centenary Discourse on the Writings of Burns;* and, on the other, across the wide Atlantic, Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes sounds his lyre to the same popular strain; though these two conspicuous examples do not, by any means, exhaust the list. In every other town and village in Scotland, and in England and Ireland, and in America and the Colonies, medical men were not only present at the celebrations, but, in numerous instances, they presided and proposed the toast of the Immortal Memory, in a manner entirely worthy of the best traditions of the profession.

This circumstance of the veteran Kincardine doctor's essay into the dangerous field of Burns speculation and criticism is all the more remarkable, because, though like Dr. Moir, a notable example of the successful union of medicine and letters, his walk of literature was not in the realms of poesy and humorous fiction, but amid the severer classicism of Grecian lore. Like Delta, too, his literary achievements were the product of hard-earned and scanty leisure, and what he could steal from his sleep, as he was all his life a hard-working "Country Doctor."—"It is a noticeable fact," says a writer in a cutting from the *Scotsman*, May 1857, with this heading, which I came across the other day in the Mitchell Library, pasted by some loving hand on the title-page of a small volume, in which Dr. Adams's centenary lecture is bound up with Carlyle's celebrated essay and other pamphlets; and from its style and contents, I should say, is from

the pen of the author of *Rab and His Friends*, Dr. John Brown, who writes so charmingly of the Deeside practitioner in his *Horae Subsecivae*—"It is a noticeable fact, and something to be proud of, that the most learned physician in Britain, and probably in Europe, is at this moment a country surgeon in a small village on Deeside—Dr. Francis Adams, of Upper Banchory, the editor and translator of Hippocrates, Paulus Ægineta, and Aretaeus. We well remember finding this great scholar at his careless *jentaculum*, diverting himself with doing an ode of Horace into Greek verse; being then, and we daresay still, at the call of any shepherd's 'crying wife' up in the solitudes of Clochnabane, and living such a life as we all remember Scott describing in the 'Surgeon's Daughter.' In any other country, such a man would not have been permitted to remain long in such a position—Scotia is assuredly *leonum arida nutrix*. Our lions are very drily nursed—they are perhaps all the more lively and leonine—but small thanks to their mother."

After this highly interesting introduction to Dr. John Brown's "Country Doctor," who was familiarly known as Francie Adams in the district, where he was considered the best surgeon and the worst equestrian, and who, while "fighting for a livelihood, educating his family, and involved in his multifarious and urgent duties," found time to become the author of upwards of a score of publications—surely "one of the most signal instances of the pursuit and mastery of knowledge under difficulties, to be found even among our Scottish Worthies," the reader may be made acquainted with the fact, that his admiration for the *Writings of Burns* was both high and enthusiastic. His *Discourse*, indeed, which shows both fullness and knowledge

of his subject, is a well-reasoned, judicious, and generous tribute to the marvellous genius of Burns as a poet, setting him high above all other lyric singers, of whatever country or clime, either before his day or since. Nor is his treatment of the man a whit less large-minded and charitable, which is saying a good deal, when it is remembered that his discourse was delivered in the Church (the shops in the town being shut that day), and that it required more sincerity of conviction and bravery to write as Dr. Adams did forty years ago than now. Speaking of his religion and morality, he says, "Never can it be said of Burns that (to use the solemn language of a great moralist) 'he tortured his fancy and ransacked his memory only that he might leave the world less virtuous than he found it, might intercept the hopes of the rising generation, and spread snares for the soul with greater dexterity.' O, no! Burns was not the man to call right wrong, and wrong right. Those who judge harshly of Burns are generally cold-blooded formalists in religion, and these are not the persons to sit in judgment on him to whom (assuredly for some noble purpose) his Creator had given

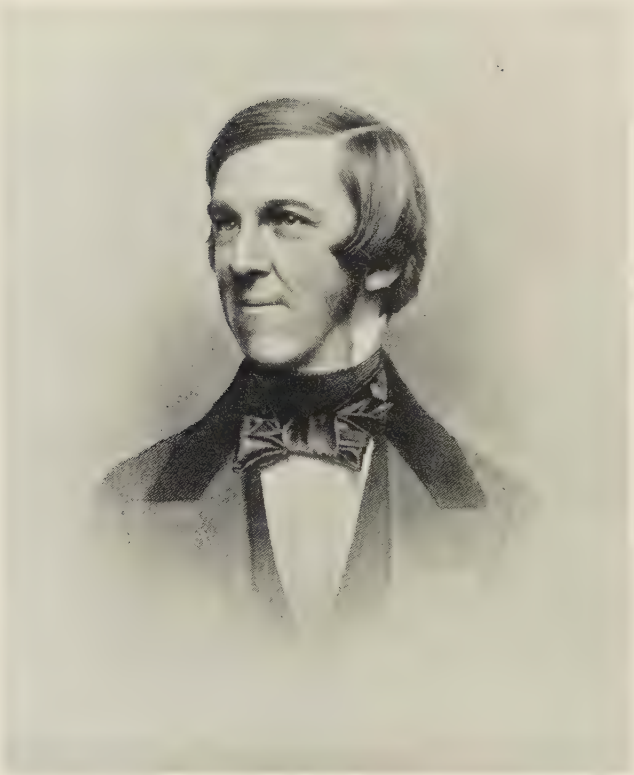
'The thrilling frame and eagle spirit of a child of song.'"

Again, "My own estimate of Burns's moral conduct during 'the few and weary days of his sojourn here below' may be given in a few words. He had his sins and his follies; alas! who is amongst us that has not? But it is my deliberate opinion that, to the best of his ability, he always did justice, loved mercy, and walked humbly with God; that if he saw a fellow-creature an hungered, none could be more prompt to give him food—if athirst, to give him drink—or if in prison, to minister to him. Is not this the true spirit of Christianity?

Let us join then in the prayer of Wordsworth, who himself had a deep sympathy with Nature and the poet of Nature—

> 'Sweet Mercy! to the gates of Heaven
> This minstrel lead, his sins forgiven;
> The rueful conflict, the heart riven
> With vain endeavour,
> And memory of earth's bitter leaven
> Effaced for ever.
>
> But why to him confine the prayer,
> When kindred thoughts and yearnings bear
> On the frail heart the purest share
> With all who live?—
> The best of what we do and are,
> Just God, forgive!'"

Talking of the Poet's coarseness in certain of his poems, particularly in his satires, he has also a sensible word. Had Burns lived in our day he would, doubtless, have written differently; and he readily admits that the usages of the present day in these respects are preferable. But he could hardly help himself; he simply did what every writer in the same line did, viz., copy the example of the great masters of comic satire who had preceded him. And, after all, as Dr. Adams very pertinently reminds us, "Coarseness in speaking or in writing was a thing that concerned the manners rather than the morals, and merely affected the surface of character. In this respect it was akin to filthiness in personal habits. It did not follow because a man had a foul skin or spoke coarsely at times, that he was corrupt to the core. In short, the heart might be clean, although the skin or mouth was foul."



DR. OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

From Vol I. of the Riverside Edition of "The Writings of O. W. Holmes."
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Turning now from the hardy north, where this learned "Country Doctor" thought so kindly and spoke so sanely of Burns, the poet and the man, I would ask you to glance for a little to the other side of the Atlantic, where, from the city of Boston,

Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes

sent forth his *Centennial Poem* in honour of the 1859 celebration.

Dr. Holmes has bulked so largely and so long in the eye of the reading world as a man of letters that it is not generally known how distinguished an ornament he was of his own profession; though nobody acquainted with medicine can read his works without, as his friend and correspondent, Professor Sir W. T. Gairdner, of Glasgow, says, being struck "with the large grasp of contemporary thought, combined with medical and physiological illustration, as a quite new phenomenon alike in literature and medicine." "I have passed," he humorously remarked himself a few years ago, in a conversation with the late editor of the *British Medical Journal*, "the best years of my life as a doctor, and I hope they are not ashamed of me, and do not reproach me for choosing to tread the flowery path of very light literature." As a matter of fact Dr. Holmes, like Moir and Adams, was, and had been, a hard-working practitioner in the city of Boston when he wrote his *Centennial Poem on Burns*. In 1843, when he was only thirty-four years of age, he published his great controversial *Essay on the Treatment of Puerperal* (child-bed) *Fever*, which, in its splendid prescience, anticipated the marvellous bacteriological discoveries of our own

day. He was appointed in 1847 to the chair of Anatomy and Physiology at Harvard University, a post he held with great acceptance and distinction for the long period of forty years. While performing his professional duties, he still carried on his practice in Boston; finding time in the midst of it all to woo the Muse, and even to deliver lectures to "lyceum assemblies."

It was in the very thick of this busy time, then, 1857 to 1859, when his *Breakfast Table* papers were running in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and apprising the reading world that a new and original star had arisen on the literary horizon, that he threw his centennial

> "pebble on the cairn
> Of him, though dead, undying;
> Sweet Nature's nursling, bonniest bairn
> Beneath her daisies lying."

But the whole poem, which is a beautiful tribute to the genius and humanity of Burns, is also distinguished by that wise charity for which, I contend, doctors are proverbial, as the following lines show:—

> "We love him, not for sweetest song,
> Though never tone so tender;
> We love him, even in his wrong,—
> His wasteful self-surrender.
>
> We praise him, not for gifts divine,—
> His Muse was born of woman,—
> His manhood breathes in every line,—
> Was ever heart more human?

We love him, praise him, just for this :
In every form and feature,
Through wealth and want, through woe and bliss,
He saw his fellow creature !

No soul could sink beneath his love,—
Not even angel blasted ;
No mortal power could soar above
The pride that all outlasted !

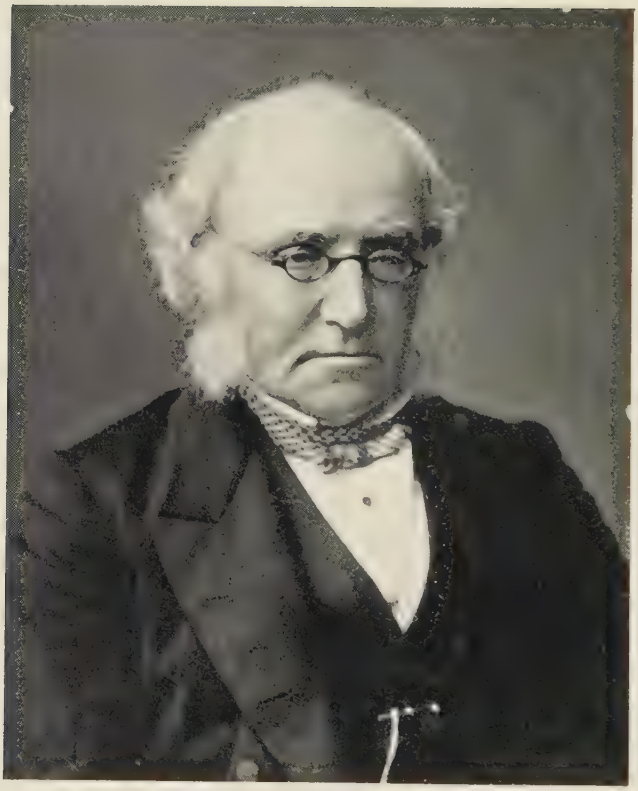
Ay ! Heaven had set one living man
Beyond the pedant's tether,—
His virtues, frailties, He may scan
Who weighs them altogether."

The following charming little incident, recorded thirty years after, shows that this evergreen doctor's heart still remained unchanged to its first love. In replying to my friend, Dr. John Dougall, Glasgow, who had sent him some daisies gathered from the field at Mossgiel, after first pressing them between the leaves of a copy of *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, and afterwards in the pages of a copy of *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*, he says, "The daisies from Mossgiel remain as when you sent them, except that I gave one of them to a lady, who, I know, would value it highly. I feel much obliged to you for sending them, and they are not less welcome for the pleasant letter that comes with them. I am proud to think that my book found itself in the company of *Marcus Aurelius*, and that it should hold between its leaves the modest flower which Burns has invested with a tender beauty it never drew from the soil or air in which it grew. You need not be surprised that Americans are frequent pilgrims to the places made dear to

them, and to all that read his songs, by the poetry of Burns. He ought to have passed ten years of his life—or five at least —in America, for those words of his—

'A man's a man for a' that,'

show that true American feeling belonged to him as much as if he had been born in sight of the hill before me as I write—Bunker Hill."



Dr. JOHN BROWN

(Rab and his Friends.)

VIII.

DR. JOHN BROWN AND OTHERS, DOWN TO THE END OF THE EIGHTIES.

It is a supreme satisfaction to be able to link in the present inquiry the name of Dr. John Brown, the celebrated author of *Rab and His Friends* and a whole host of other, the most delightful, essays and papers and sketches, comprised in his *Horae Subsecivae.* The writings in these volumes, exhibiting, as they do, a most captivating and beautiful individualism, wide culture, great purity of style, and elevated thought, have justly become English classics. Their ripe wisdom, moreover, and soundest of common-sense-teaching on medical subjects, on art, and on the great verities of human life and religion, make them a library in themselves, the knowledge alone of which would be an education in itself to any young man, and, in particular, I often think, to any young medical man; for, though Dr. Brown was not, in the same sense perhaps as Holmes (whom in other respects he strongly resembles), a medical pioneer himself, he understood, none better, the history and philosophy of medicine and medical teaching, and became, with shrewdest insight, the historian and critic of some of the great medical movements and the men chiefly concerned in them.

While the whole world was ringing with the centennial celebrations of Burns, this sweet-blooded Edinburgh physician

and most lovable of all men of letters was preparing for the press his *Horae Subsecivae*, which contains some interesting bits of Burnsiana.

In the heading to that most charming paper, "Oh, I'm wat, wat," he relates a very pretty little incident in the youthful life of Burns, illustrative of his, even then, gift of humour. I give it in the doctor's own words:—

"*The Father of the Rev. Mr. Steven of Largs was the son of a farmer, who lived next farm to Mossgiel. When a boy of eight, he found 'Robbie,' who was a great friend of his, and of all the children, engaged digging a large trench in a field, Gilbert, his brother, with him. The boy pausing on the edge of the trench, and looking down upon Burns, said, 'Robbie, what's that ye're doin'?' 'Howkin' a muckle hole, Tammie.' 'What for?' 'To bury the Deil in, Tammie!' (one can fancy how those eyes would glow). 'A' but, Robbie,' said the logical Tammie, 'hoo're ye to get him in?' 'Ay,' said Burns, 'that's it, hoo are we to get him in!' and went off into shouts of laughter; and every now and then during that summer day shouts would come from that hole as the idea came over him. If one could only have daguerreotyped his day's fancies!*"

In a finely imagined analysis of the old song, "Aye Waukin', O!" he contrasts the version of it in *Chambers' Scottish Songs* with Burns's amended reading of the same; and very much, it must be confessed, provided his view of Burns's version is the correct one, to the disadvantage of the latter. At the same time, he admits that Burns, in almost every instance, not only adorned, but transformed and

purified whatever of the old he touched, breathing into it his own tenderness and strength. And he describes, as the chief charm of the love songs of Burns, that the Poet is not making love, but in it. "Certainly," he says, "of all love songs except those wild snatches left to us by her who flung herself from the Leucadian Rock, those of Burns are the most in earnest, the tenderest, the 'most moving, delicate, and full of life.' Burns makes you feel the reality and the depth, the truth of his passion: it is not her eye-lashes, or her nose, or her dimple, or even

> 'A mole cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops
> I' the bottom of a cowslip,'

that are 'winging the fervour of his love;' not even her soul; it is herself. This concentration and earnestness, this *perfervor* of our Scottish love poetry, seems to me to contrast curiously with the light, trifling, philandering of the English; indeed, as far as I remember, we have almost no love songs in English, of the same class as this one, or those of Burns. They are mostly either of the genteel, or of the nautical (some of these capital), or of the comic school. Do you know the most perfect, the finest love-song in our or in any language; the love being affectionate more than passionate, love in possession, not in pursuit?

> 'Oh, wert thou in the cauld blast
> On yonder lea, on yonder lea,
> My plaidie to the angry airt,
> I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee:
> Or did Misfortune's bitter storms
> Around thee blaw, around thee blaw,
> Thy bield should be my bosom,
> To share it a', to share it a'.

Or were I in the wildest waste,
Sae black and bare, sae black and bare.
The desert were a paradise,
If thou wert there, if thou wert there:
Or were I monarch o' the globe,
Wi' thee to reign, wi' thee to reign,
The brightest jewel in my crown
Wad be my queen, wad be my queen.' "

The inspiration for this, among the last, if not the very last, of the love-songs the Poet ever wrote, was supplied by Jessy Lewars, she who tended him on his deathbed, playing over and over on the piano the air of that old song,

" The robin cam' to the wren's nest,
And keekit in, and keekit in."

Dr. Brown, in a passage in that beautiful paper on " Arthur H. Hallam," further emphasises this affectionate character of the love in Burns's songs. " We can," he says, speaking of *In Memoriam*, " recall few poems approaching to it in this quality of sustained affection. The only English poems we can think of as of the same order, are Cowper's lines on seeing his mother's portrait:—

' O that these lips had language ! '

Burns to ' Mary in Heaven ; ' and two pieces of Vaughan—one beginning,

' O thou who know'st for whom I mourn ; '

and the other,

' They are all gone into the world of light.' "

Following close upon the recent celebrations, and probably inspired by them, I have also to chronicle the name of

James Strachan, Surgeon, Blackford,

author of *A Voyage to the Arctic Regions*, a gentleman who was in active country medical practice for upwards of thirty-five years, and in the autumn of his days published a little volume of poetry, entitled, *Moral Pieces in Rhyme and Blank Verse*, Edinburgh, 1860. His treatment of the various subjects of his muse, which, as their title indicates, are mostly of a religious and moral character, is slight and short, the execution not being always equal to, or worthy of the theme. In an *Acrostic on Burns*, an *Episode*, and *Tam o' Shanter*, he refers to Burns, and sings his praises, perhaps with more warmth of heart than poetic skill. He is inclined to overlook the debauchery in *Tam o' Shanter* in consideration of its other merits.

> "Gif you or me find fault, we're unco bauld
> Wi' him who wrat sae much for our enjoy,
> An' fley'd sae muckle grief frae our employ."

And likewise, as appearing very soon after, if not, indeed, actually belonging to the centenary category, I ought to include the name of

Robert Dick, M.D., C.M.,

who graduated at Glasgow University in 1834; practised in London and Edinburgh; and died at the latter city in 1878. He was as prolific with his pen, as he was extravagant in the subjects which it handled, being, among other works, the

author of, *Derangements of the Organs of Digestion*, 1840; *A New and Catholic Liturgy*, 1846; *Physiology, its Physical, Moral, Political, and Hygienic Teachings; an Essay in Blank Verse*, 1849; *The Literary Aurora*, 1858; *Marriage and Population, their Natural Laws*, 1858; *The Spiritual Dunciad*, 1859; and the *Autobiography and Poetical Compositions, including Tartarus, Elysium, Elijah, and the Paulopost of Man; or, the Land; Rent, and Food-Free, and Concrete Air—Nitrogen Millenium*, 1863; which remarkable work contains an *Ode on the Centenary of Burns's Birthday.*

However insane the company, judging from the foregoing titles, in which this ode finds itself, there is nothing of madness in its matter. It sets out by sketching the character, particularly in its sterner aspects, of our Scottish scenery, amid which the Poet was nurtured; and describes a snow-storm.

> "But ah! full soon Toil came to claim the boy;
> Leaving too narrow phase
> Of happy, vacant days,
> 'To paidle i' the burn and rin about the braes,'
> His frame, while still unknit, the plough, the scythe employ."

Then it notes how his "manly sire" took careful heed for the education and culture of his mind; how he suddenly awoke to fame; went to "Edina's regal seat" and received the homage of the learned and the great. "But," it significantly asks—

> "Was he happier then,
> Even in the proudest hour,
> Than when he told his tale of love,
> In hawthorn-scented bower?"

and answers in the negative—

"No! for ambition, glory are apart
From man's true nature, never fill'd his heart;
But love, pure, holy, *homely*,
Of woman, modest, comely,
Is still the heavenliest gift
Of which lost Eden's outcast is unreft;
And this, Burns, natheless all his errors, knew,
When link'd to long-lov'd Jean, at last in wedlock true!"

It next conducts his reluctant footsteps from that Edinburgh, which, it has been wisely said, "took so much out of him and put so little back in its place."

"From dulcet-mingled wiles
Of man's applause and woman's smiles;
From pleasure, dazzling success, beauty,
To humble rustic duty,
Unmann'd in nought the Bard returns,
More purely, brightly burns
The light of Genius in him;
His fancy every theme adorns;
Temptations rarely win him.
Then struck his lyre those chords,
Even henceforth to be
A nation's deathless 'household words,'
His lay of 'Auld lang syne,'
And other minstrelsy;
Which Scot with Scot will chorus,
While lasts the land that bore us.

Drop we the veil o'er Burns's after-story.
For us, for him too soon,
His sun went down at noon;
Fault and mischance dimming its parting glory.

He left his name
Amid his country's constellations,
In the poetic sky,
Immortally
To sparkle on with brightest corruscations,
In comic and pathetic alternations."

It usually happens after great events, like the 1859 Celebrations, that enthusiasm exhausts itself and a period of reaction sets in. But the press was as active as ever in issuing new editions. Monuments too, were being erected, one after another, all over the country. There were, besides, other collateral Burnsiana publications constantly making their appearance, as the ever-increasing bibliographies bewilderingly inform us. And if the adage has any application, it must be to the medical profession; for there is a gap of thirteen years between the tiny tributes of Strachan and Dick and the delivery of a lecture on, *Robert Burns, the Poet*, by

DAVID SIME, M.D., INELLAN,

before the good people of that little Clyde watering place, where he was the resident medical practitioner, and which was afterwards, at the special request of his audience, published by Maclehose & Sons, Glasgow. Eight years later, April, 1881, the same lecture (if not exactly word for word, at least thought for thought) appeared as an article in the *Catholic Presbyterian*, under the title of the *Poetry of Robert Burns*. His point of view here is precisely that of the original lecture, only, if anything, a little more pronounced. He treats his subject from the aspect of the poet rather than the man, as the latter might long since have been, and is, indeed, being, forgotten, but for the mar-

vellous genius of the former keeping him alive. And though he adopts this course advisedly, because he is of opinion that the sooner the man, with his struggles and his errors, is forgotten, the better—that, indeed, it is of no consequence he should be remembered since we have his works, he cannot altogether escape glancing at the man, whose frailties he touches with the same generous hand that we have seen characterises his medical brethren generally.

All the same, Dr. Sime does not appear to have been attracted by the man, Robert Burns, in the same degree that he has been by his poetry; and the reason probably is (for he holds the usual stereotyped view of his errors), that he has not studied his life as deeply as he seems to have done his works. He is not one of those who feel that we ought to be as grateful for his life as his poetry—that, in fact, we could not have had the special kind and quality of poetry he has given us, without, at the same time, his special characterisation, with all its moral riskiness, which produced it; and that if we esteem the product a good and wholesome thing, then we must loyally accept the other. It does not seem to have occurred to Dr. Sime, as it did to Wordsworth, that "many peculiar beauties which enrich his verses could never have existed, and many accessory influences, which contribute greatly to their effect, would have been wanting, unless it were felt that he was a man who preached from the text of his own errors; and whose wisdom, beautiful as a flower that might have risen from seed sown from above, was in fact a scion from the root of personal suffering." Nor does he, like Oliver Wendell Holmes,

> "love him, even in his wrong—
> His wasteful self-surrender."

This larger and Wordsworthian view—that the Poet's loss is our gain; that through his sorrows and his errors we are the nearer blessing and wisdom; and that, therefore, we ought to accept his life, broken as it is, with humble thankfulness and reverent pityfulness, is quite foreign to Dr. Sime's conception. He has not considered that the enthusiasm of the Scottish people for their Bard has its origin in, and draws its very sustenance from, his personality; and that to strike it out of the bargain would be to give the death-blow to our Burns worship, which has grown up around the man, even more than his work. If it were possible, which it is not, to view Burns purely as a literary artist, like Shakspere and Scott, there could be no more anniversary celebrations, which the doctor perhaps might not consider an unmixed blessing.

But if Dr. Sime, in the plan of his paper, deliberately chooses to ignore the man, he devotes himself all the more enthusiastically to a masterly analysis of his poems and songs, which shows him to be possessed of considerable culture, rare insight, and a very distinctive literary gift, which, I understand, he is exercising with success at the present day in London, being already the author of *In Manbury City*, a novel, and *The Literary Charm of the Pilgrim's Progress.*

There is a further lapse of nine years, as far as I have been able to inform myself, between Dr. Sime's very admirable performance and that of a much less ambitious character, which only merits notice here, as being from the pen of

JOHN M'COSH, M.D., EDIN., F.R.C.S.E., H.E.I.C.S., AND F.R.G.S.L.

He was a native of Kirkmichael, Ayrshire; studied at Glasgow from 1827 to 30, in which latter year he became a Licentiate of the R.C.S.E.; then probably entered into the Government Service of India, the experience gained in that field forming the subject of his thesis, *On the Prospects and Practice of a Bengall Medical Officer*, with which he graduated M.D. in Edinburgh in 1841. He also published several other works relating to India and the East, as *Topography of Assam*, Calcutta, 1837; *Medical Advice to the Indian Stranger*, London, 1841; *Advice to Officers in India*, London, 1856. He was likewise the author of *Nuova Italia*, and the volume which is the subject of the present notice, published in 1882, and entitled, *Sketches in Verse at Home and Abroad, and from the War of the Nile*, in Ten Cantos. In the fourth canto of this work, which ranges over a wide field of contemporary subjects and events, he takes the reader a ramble through the Land of Burns, his visit to Auld Ayr, in particular, he tells us, being a case of the scenes of youth revisited.

> "Full fifty years have passed away
> Since in auld Ayr we had our stay,
> And now return in sad dismay,
> At change of names and places."

He pays the most reverent homage at the shrines of the Poet in Alloway and Dumfries, moralises on his chequered career in the latter town, and on the ungrateful neglect of its inhabitants towards their Bard, for the offspring of whose muse he predicts, the world o'er, a never dying fame.

I shall close this chapter with a contribution of a slightly more noteworthy character, published four years later, 1886 —*Poems, Songs, and Sonnets*, by

WILLIAM STENHOUSE, M.D.,

who was a Glasgow graduate, and practised in Dunedin, N.Z. (being honorary physician to the hospital there), and in London. Some three years before the publication of his little book of poems he was compelled to have his foot amputated; and was just contemplating resuming his professional labours with renewed energy when he received a serious injury to his spine through a carriage accident, which entirely laid him aside from active practice. It was, he tells us in his preface, written from Fitzroy Square, London, during the sleepless nights, consequent on his long and serious illness, that he wrote his book of poems, which treat mainly of the social, moral, and political questions of the day, questions which, however much they may be considered by some to be without the range of poetry, are, nevertheless, he assures us, bound up with the welfare of the race.

His *January Twenty-Fifth*, however, the poem which entitles him to a notice here, is surely not in that category—beyond that pale, being one of those much berhymed subjects, which, if we are to judge by the frequency with which it is chosen, lends itself most admirably to poetical treatment. If Dr. Stenhouse's performance is not one of the very best, it is certainly not one of the worst; and, particularly in that charity which covereth a multitude of sins, artistic as well as moral, is in harmony with the general pronouncement of his medical brethren.

"So good and ill are mixed
By the Creator's will,
With enmity betwixt
That good may evil kill.
But in this contest stern
The strongest often fail,
And through their failure learn
At last how to prevail.
Thus David and his son
Oft in this contest fell,
And were but all undone,
As sacred writ can tell.
Was Shakspere without stain,
Or Goethe the profound,
That some should so complain
Our Burns was unsound?
He sinned and suffered much,
And, by experience taught,
He warned us that such
Is with grave perils fraught,
As gentle as a maid,
He was as woman weak—
Ere tempted to upbraid
Let his sweet merit speak."

IX.

A DECADE OF MEDICAL BURNSITES, INCLUDING DR. JAMES ADAMS, GLASGOW.

Coming down to still more recent times—the nineties, when Burns-worship, no longer a synonym for Bacchus-worship, is gradually dissociating itself from the unworthy orgies common to the devotees of this jovial god, and becoming crystallised into a sort of ritual of its own—a more or less shapely organisation, with high and worthy purposes, such as the institution among school children of prize competitions in singing and recitation, with the object of encouraging the study of the works of Burns in their native Doric; the establishment of homes for the indigent, like those at Mossgiel; exhibitions of the relics, manuscripts, and editions of Burns; and such like kindred projects.

The Burnsites, throughout the world, are no longer a heterogeneous mass of atoms, whose enthusiasm is only apparent on the twenty-fifth of January, on which night it evaporates even more completely than the steam of the toddy circulating round the table. They are now a coherent and highly influential body of federated clubs, which boasts an organ of its own—*The Annual Burns Chronicle*, devoted to the interests, aims, and purposes of the Burns cult. Nor can I see any reason why our Burns-worship should not become more and more practical every year; and that too, in spite of the character usually ascribed to our patron saint

JAMES ADAMS, M.D., F.F.P.S.G.

—that he was not practical, which I hold is a gross libel ; for in every community in which he lived he was among the foremost in starting any good work which had for its object the moral and intellectual improvement of his fellows, notably his passion for founding libraries.

I don't know whether it was these improved times among Burns's adherents which found out

Dr. James Adams,

a veteran Glasgow practitioner, or he who found out them ? I should rather think it was the latter—that he discovered himself at this period ; for there is the fullest evidence in his writings that he has been an ardent and enthusiastic Burns scholar all his life, and is only now, in his aged retirement, giving the world of his ripeness. His *Burns's 'Chloris,' a Reminiscence*, which appeared in August, 1893, is an exceedingly readable little book, being written in a vigorous, direct, and freshly-piquant style ; and is as creditable to his heart as his head. In speaking of his own modest performance he is, he says, "encouraged to think there may be some of the mind of Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, who said that he admitted a sheep's head dressed for dinner was not a very bonny dish, 'but, man, there's a heap o' gude, confused feedin' aboot it.'" I admit the heap o' feedin', without the confusion ; for, so full is his knowledge, he rather brings order out of confusion.

Ostensibly, the little book is a vindication of the character of Jean Lorimer (Burns's "Chloris")—"the lassie wi' the lint-white locks," from the unworthy slanders and base inuendos of Allan Cunninghame, whom the writer, in certain passages of righteous indignation and trenchant criticism, which are as

refreshing and invigorating as the nor'land breezes, does not spare. Though this is his ostensible purpose, he necessarily travels over a great deal of highly-interesting Burns ground, showing a most intimate acquaintance with the entire theme; and winds up with an earnest and eloquent appeal for a people's (family) edition of Burns—a Burns that might be read by a father to his sons and daughters, and from which every coarse and unworthy word would be eliminated; and he bases the wisdom, and justice, and generosity of his appeal upon the dying words of Burns himself.

"Chloris," he tells us, in her later Edinburgh days, was a patient of his worthy father; and he relates, in a most charmingly-realistic way, how, as a boy, on his way home from school, he went, by his father's instructions, to her house to receive a packet containing some Burns manuscripts, with which the grateful old lady insisted on presenting the doctor, as he would take no fee for his professional attendance upon her. From this "Reminiscence" he proceeds to the triumphant vindication of the character of "Chloris," whom he proves, up to the hilt, only to have been a "white-flower love" of the Poet, and whose only sin was her misfortune. Indeed, he shows, by evidence of the most conclusive character, that there never was, or could have been, anything between the pair but what was entirely honourable to Jean Lorimer either as a young girl or deserted wife, and to Burns as a married man and her lyric artist admirer. He points out, moreover, that "Chloris" was as much a friend of Mrs. Burns as of the Poet himself, all their intercourse being above board, and participated in, and approved of by her. Mrs. Burns, indeed, to her dying day, never entertained any other notion about poor "Chloris," but that she was an

innocent, though unfortunate woman in her early marriage with a scamp, who immediately thereafter deserted her. Besides, the Lorimers and the Burnses were not only on terms of great intimacy, but were in the habit of visiting at each other's homes, which is incredible had the Poet's relationship to his model not been of the worthiest. As illustrating the honourable terms of intimacy existing between the two families, Dr. Adams quotes a letter from Burns, August, 1795, inviting Mr. Lorimer and his daughter Jean to dine with him at his house in Dumfries, to meet Mr. Robert Cleghorn and two Midlothian farmers, friends of the Poet. "Mrs. Burns," he says in his note to Mr. Lorimer, "desired me yesternight to beg the favour of Jeanie to come and partake, and she was so obliging to promise that she would." Drs. Maxwell and Mundell, he likewise informs him, are to be of the dinner-party, at which Mrs. Burns, all unconscious of jealousy or like feeling, sang, to the great delight of her guests, one of the "Chloris" songs, "O, That's the Lassie o' My Heart."

Dr. Adams even further demonstrates, if further demonstration were necessary, how Burns, after "Chloris's" desertion, with a beautifully-tender consideration on his part, chose his themes in song, with a view to show his sympathy for her, and to help her to retain her self-respect in the midst of her misfortunes, when, doubtless, there were in the little *School for Scandal* round about her, plenty of askance looks, and Mrs. Grundy-whisperings and head-shakings.

Having finally disposed of Allan Cunninghame's worse than base fictions, our author then plunges into the subject of "Chloris" and the thirty songs inspired by, or dedicated to her, and this he does with a fulness of knowledge and insight,

and a subtlety of criticism, which shows that he knows his subject thoroughly, not only as a literary historian, but as a true critic of lyric art.

Dr. Adams has published several other valuable contributions to Burnsiana literature—*The Pot Boiler—an Impeachment and Defence; Deity and Dirt—a Review of an old Controversy on Robert Burns; Burns as an Exciseman; Glimpses of Clarinda in Edinburgh Sixty Years since*—all written in the same racy, terse, and piquant style, just, I fancy, as the doctor would talk; and showing, by his wealth and aptness of quotation, that he knows his Shakspere as well as his Burns, but his "Chloris" is his *chef d'oeuvre.*

In bringing this inquiry, *Robert Burns and the Medical Profession*, to a close, I have now briefly to chronicle, as belonging to the same period of Burns Renaissance in which the name of Dr. Adams so worthily figures, the following contributions from members of the medical faculty at home and abroad, and my task is finished.

Poem on Robert Burns, by

DR. JOHN M. HARPER,

written on the Occasion of the Poet's Anniversary, and read before the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, of which the author is Vice-President.

Robert Burns, a Lecture delivered in Investigator Hall, Paine Memorial, before the Ingersoll Secular Society, by

DR. W. SYMINGTON BROWN.

In this able, sympathetic, and well-written lecture, the doctor traces the secret of the Poet's popularity; though, as might

be expected, considering the audience before whom it was delivered, he uses his name somewhat unfairly as a text to preach secularistic and agnostic ideas. Nevertheless, as he travels through his life-story, he lays his finger on a good many sensible things, one or two of which are worth quoting. "Burns must have been a very industrious man, who set a proper estimate on the value of time, and worked while it was day with all his might." "It is evident that no habitual drunkard could have produced such an amount of good literary work in so short a time."

In speaking of his intimacies with Highland Mary, Jean Armour, and Mrs. Maclehose, which, however inexplicable, unjustifiable, and even discreditable, were, nevertheless, he affirms, the inspirers of some of his very best songs, which, "it is safe to say would never have been written if Burns had been a model youth, after the Sunday School pattern. You take your choice whether it would have been better to lose the poetry or the passion."

Lines on the Burns Statue at Albany, N.Y., by

D. M. Henderson, M.D., Baltimore.

The Epistles of Noah (Glasgow, 1883), contains "Burns: from a Showman's Pint o' View," by

William Findlay, M.D. (Geo. Umber), Glasgow.

In Ross's *Burnsiana* (Paisley, 1894), "Lamb and Burns," by the same author; in *Burns's Highland Mary* (Paisley, 1894), "Highland Mary in Fact and Fiction;" in *In My City Garden* (Paisley, 1895), "A Bairns' Burns's Anniversary;" and in *Ayrshire Idylls* (Paisley, 1896), "A Ride in a Carrier's Cart" through a famous nook in the Land of Burns.

Anniversary Poem (January 25th, 1894) on Robert Burns, by

DR. BENJAMIN F. LEGGETTE,

Author of *A Sheaf of Song*, *A Tramp through Switzerland*, etc., etc.

Verses on Robert Burns, by

DR. A. M. M'CLELLAND, TORONTO, CANADA.

The late, much esteemed, and highly popular east-end Glasgow doctor,

GEORGE R. MATHER, M.D.,

was a noted lover and collector of the Fine Arts, particularly the examples of Bough and Chalmers, in which his collection was very rich; and the enthusiastic memorialist of the brothers, Drs. William and John Hunter, under the title of *Two Great Scotsmen*, published by Maclehose & Sons in 1892. He was also the author of a paper on the *Genius and Character of Burns*, originally delivered as an address before the Dennistoun Burns Club (of which he was President) on January 25th, 1892; and sometime after his sudden and startlingly tragic death at a Faculty dinner while replying to the toast of the Army, Navy, and Volunteers (of one of the corps of which latter body he was the popular surgeon), published by his widow, along with other of his literary fragments, in a neat memorial volume, from the press of R. Robertson, Glasgow. 1896.

If the burly doctor, who was, at all times, distinguished for the geniality and warmth of his feelings, as well as for the

eloquent and manly expression of what he felt, sheds no fresh light on the well-worn theme, or enriches it with no new or subtle thought, certainly no warmer, heartier, or more generous tribute, than this in the glowing and robust words of Dr. Mather, was ever paid to the "Genius and Character of Burns," whose "poems," he tells us, "are full of the most generous sentiments, the interfusion of which tends to bind men brothers over the world; they kindle anew feelings of patriotism, which make us proudly revere the great and glorious past, and resolve to guard at sacrifice of heart's blood what our fathers won for us; they preserve under consecrating light the memories of home—its duties, its joys, and its sorrows; they soothe us in the hour of heart-wreck, when all is dark and drear; and they cheer us as no jovial songs of any time have ever done, in our hours of sociality, when innocent mirth rules high."

An Account of the Art of Typography, as practised in Alnwick from 1781 to 1815, with biographical notes of all the publications during that period, by

C. Clark Burman, L.R.C.P. and S., Edin., Alnwick:

Printed by the *Alnwick and County Gazette*, and Steam Printing Co., Ltd., 21 Bondgate Within, Alnwick, 1896.

The above learned and able paper was read by Dr. Burman, a medical practitioner in Alnwick, before the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association of that town, on February 12th, 1896, and afterwards published; the author's enthusiastic admiration of the marvellous powers of Thomas Bewick as an engraver on wood, he tells us in his "Foreword," inducing him to illustrate a few special copies with examples

of wood-cuts executed by the celebrated Newcastle engraver exclusively for Alnwick printers. Among the wood-cuts furnished are eight vignettes from *Burns's Poems*, and sixteen of the tail-pieces from the same work, all printed, he informs us in interesting detail, from the original blocks which were specially supplied by Mr. Bewick from designs by Mr. Thurston for the famous 1808 Alnwick edition of the *Poetical Works of Robert Burns*, with his life, in two volumes; and which blocks are now in the doctor's own collection.

All about Highland Mary, is the title of an article in Dr. Ross's, *All about Burns*, 1896, by

THEODORE F. WOLFE, A.M., M.D.

It was "prepared," he tells us, "during a sojourn in 'The Land of Burns'—while it adds a little to our meagre knowledge of Mary Campbell, aims to present consecutively and congruously so much as may now be known of her brief life, her relations to the bard and her sad, heroic death,"—which is a very good description of his purpose and achievement.

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APPENDIX.

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INDEX.

INDEX.

Adair, Dr. James McKittrick, B.'s fellow-traveller in vale of Devon, 31.
Adams, Dr. Francis, Banchory, "the most learned physician in Europe," 104.
B.'s religion and morality by, 105.
His coarseness by, 106.
Adams, Dr. James, Glasgow, vindication of "Chloris" by, 125-127.
Other Burnsiana contributions by, 128.
Ainslie, Dr. W., 92.
Aird, Thomas, Dumfries, friend of "Delta," 96, 97.
Alison, Sheriff Archibald, 96.
Alloway, Grand Festival at, in 1844, 96.
Armour, Jean, 17, 43.
Her opinion of "Chloris," 126, 129.
Auld-licht party, 10.
Ayton, William, advocate, 96.

Bell, Henry Glassford, 96.
Blacklock, Archibald, surgeon, Dumfries, 65.
Blair, Rev. Dr., Edinburgh, 19, 22.
Brown, Mr., surgeon, Dumfries, 60.
Brown, Dr. John, "Deeside Country Doctor" (Fr. Adams) by, 104.
B.'s love songs, opinion of by, their earnestness and affectionate character, 113, 114.
General estimate of, as physician and man of letters, 111.
Brown, Dr. W. Symington, on incompatibility of habitual drinking and good literary work, 129.
Burman, Dr. C. Clark, Alnwick, 131.
Burns, Gilbert, 57
Defence of his brother by, 77-80.
Visit to Liverpool of, 73.
Burns, Mrs., 74, 126, 127.
Burns, Robert, medical knowledge of, 11, 12.
Critical strictures by Dr. Gregory on "Wounded Hare" of, 27, 28.
Dr. John MacKenzie, Mauchline, his friendship for, 15-19.
"The Calf," circumstances under which it was composed, 17, 18.
Dumfries life of, and record of literary and other work accomplished during that period, 84.
Dundas family, their treatment of, 29, 30.
Ill-health of, in Dumfries, 85.
Incident at table of Lord Monboddo between Dr. Gregory and, 23.
Infirmities and errors of, and Currie's treatment of the same challenged, 77.
Loyal Dumfriesians' distrust of, on account of his liberal principles and revolutionary sympathies, and his friendship with Maxwell and Syme, 53-4.
Novelty of character more than poetic abilities responsible for Edinburgh reception of, 36, 37, 38.

On the Muses' trade, observations of, 42.
Relationship to Edinburgh *literati* of, and general saneness of point of view of, regarding the same, 49, 50.
Wood, Dr. A., friendship for, 29, 30.
Zeluco, criticisms on, by, 45.
Burns, Robert, Poet's eldest son, correspondence of, with Dr. Maxwell, 57.
Burness, William, Poet's father, deathbed of, 15.

"Calf, The," 17, 69.
Candlish, Dr. James, B.'s old Dalrymple school-fellow, 20, 21.
Candlish, Rev. Dr., Edinburgh, son of Dr. James, 2 .
Carlyle, Thomas, 9, 19, 69, 86, 87, 88.
Clarinda (Mrs. Maclehose), Edinburgh, 25, 29, 73, 129.
Clark, William, B.'s man-servant at Ellisland, testimony of, 43.
Cleghorn, Robert, Saughton Mills, 65, 127.
Coleridge, Samuel T., 75.
Cowper, the poet, 114.
Creech, William, publisher, Edinburgh, 24, 43, 44.
Crombie, Alexander, 86.
Cunninghame, Alexander, W.S., Edinburgh, 56, 70, 95.
Cunninghame, Allan, Dr. Adams' castigation of, for slandering "Chloris," 125.
Currie, Dr. James, Liverpool, 28, 31.
Adverse criticism of, for his treatment of Poet's errors, 75-79.
Death and universal approval of biographical achievement of, 74.
Difficulties of the task of, 72, 73.
Life and labours of, 69.
Mistake of, in not going further afield for his information, 80.
Offer of literary services of, and selection of, to write Life, etc., 70.
Particulars of B.'s last illness and death supplied by Maxwell to, 57, 58.
Praise of, for his biographical achievement, 94, 102.
Strictures against, further examined, and character vindicated, 81-89.

Daer, Lord, 18.
Dick, Robert, M.D., C.M., London and Edinburgh, literary enterprises of, and "Burns Birthday Ode" by, 116-118.
Doctors, charity and toleration of, 14.
Dougall, Dr. John, Glasgow, Mossgiel daisies sent to O. W. Holmes from, 109.
Douglas, eighth Duke of Hamilton, 35.
Douglas, William Scott, 16, 57, 58.
Dumfries, Earl of, 19.
Dumfries, character and politics of, in B.'s day, 51.
Death of "Delta" at, 99.
Life and work of Poet in, 84.
Dundas, Lord President, 29. 30.
Dunlop, Mrs., 31, 36, 47, 55, 57, 71, 73, 85, 88.

Eglinton, Lord, 50, 96.
Erskine, Hon. Henry, 19.

Ferguson, Dr. Adam, Edinburgh, 22.
Fergusson, Robert, the poet, 11.
Findlater, Mr., Poet's superior officer in the Excise, 77, 78.

Findlay, Dr. William, Glasgow, Burnsiana contributions of, 129.
Finlayson, Dr. James, Glasgow, 10, 66.

Gairdner, Sir W. T., Professor of Practice of Medicine in Glasgow University, on O. W. Holmes as scientist and man of letters, 107.
Gillis, Right Rev., Roman Catholic Bishop of Edinburgh, vindication of Maxwell by, 52.
Glencairn, Earl of, Poet's grateful attachment to, 46.
Goldie, John, Kilmarnock, 11, 15.
Gordon, Dr., Glasgow, Moore and Smollett apprentices to, 35.
Graham, Robert, of Fintry, 42, 44.
Gray, Mr., Dumfries Academy, 59, 77-79.
Greenfield, Rev. Prof., Edinburgh, 25.
Gregory, Prof. James, M.D., Edinburgh, B.'s friend, physician and critic, 22-28, 59.

Hamilton, Mr., of Craighlaw, 15.
Hamilton, Mrs., Harvieston, 31.
Hamilton, Charlotte, wife of Dr. Adair, 31.
Hamilton, Gavin, Mauchline, 17, 18, 31.
Hamilton, Dr., Kilmarnock, 15.
Harper, Dr. John M., Quebec, 128.
Hay, Charles, advocate, Edinburgh, 29, 30.
Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 87.
Henderson, Dr. M., Baltimore, 129.
Henley, W. E., 81, 82.
Hill, Peter, bookseller, Edinburgh, 21.
Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, 125.
Holmes, Dr. Oliver Wendell, 103.
  As doctor and man of letters, 107.
  Burns Centennial Poem by, its all-wise charity, 108.
  Dr. John Brown compared with, 111.
  Mossgiel daisies sent by Dr. Dougall to, 109.
  Poet loveable even in his wrong, 119.
Hornbook, Dr., 12, 13.
Howden, Mr., jeweller, Edinburgh, 23.
Hughes, Dr. Samuel, Hereford, 67, 68.
Hunter, John, the celebrated surgeon; and his wife, authoress of "My mother bids me bind my hair," 26.

Jeffrey, Francis, reviewer of Mrs. Hunter's poems, 26.

Kennedy, John, New York, 67.

Lamb, Charles, strictures on Currie by, 75-77.
Land, Donald's, Dr. Moore's Trongate residence, 35.
Land, Gibson's, Dr. Gordon's surgery in, 35.
Lawrie, Rev. Mr. Loudoun, 31.
Lawyers, 9.
  Human nature as viewed by, 14.
Leggette, Dr. Benjamin F., 130.
Lochlea, 15, 16.
Lockhart, John Gibson, 55, 83.
Lorimer, Jean (Chloris), character vindicated, 125.
  Jean Armour's opinion of, 126.
Lorimer, Mr., 127.

MacKenzie, John, surgeon, Mauchline, 15-20.

MacKenzie, John Whitefoord, W.S., Edinburgh, 20.
MacKenzie, Henry, Edinburgh, 22, 25.
Macnish, Dr. Robert, Glasgow, friend of "Delta," 96.
Madden, Dr. R. R., a true Irish patriot, traveller, and miscellaneous writer. "Infirmities of Genius" by, 93-95.
Mather, Dr. George R., Glasgow, 130, 131.
Mary, Highland, 129, 132.
Mauchline, churchyard of, 17.
Maxwell, Dr. William, Dumfries,
Attendance of, in Poet's last illness, 56-60, 65, 78, 80.
Jacobitism of, 51.
Presence of, at dinner in B.'s with the Lorimers, 127.
Residence in Paris of; revolutionary tendencies of; denouncement of, by Burke in House of Commons for seditious liberalism; and patriotism of, as a volunteer, 53-55.
McClelland, Dr. A. M., Toronto, Canada, 130.
McConochie, Dr. James R., Louisville, Ky., Burns recollections of, 100.
McCosh, Dr. John, Land of B. revisited by, 120, 121.
Medicine in Shakspere, 10, 13.
Medicine in Burns, 10.
Miller, Helen, one of the six Mauchline belles, married to Dr. MacKenzie, 20.
Miller, John, Millockshill, 20.
Ministers, short-sightedness of, 14.
Moffat, visit of Dr. Currie to, 74.
Moir, Dr. David Macbeth (Delta), medical and literary achievements of, and presence of, at Grand Alloway Festival, 96.
B. Commemoration Poem by, 97.
Visit to Land of B. by, and sudden illness and death of, 98.
Monboddo, Lord, Edinburgh, 22, 23.
Moore, Dr. John, London, 35-40.
Advice to B. by, to abandon Scottish stanza, 44.
Autobiographical letter from B. to, 41.
Caution to B. by, against giving away too many copies of his verses; also advising him to collect fugitive pieces for fresh publication, 46-48.
Mental attitude to B. of, 49, 50, 70.
Observations by B. on the Muses' trade to, 42, 43.
Strictures by B. on "Zeluco" of, 45.
Moore, Sir John, hero of Corunna, 35.
Moore, Dr. William, Kilmarnock, 15.
Mossgiel, 16.
Indigent Homes at, 124.
Short stay at, before returning to Edinburgh, during which he penned autobiographical letter to Dr. Moore, 41.
Moyes, Dr. John, 10.
Muir, Robert, Kilmarnock, 15.
Mundell, Dr., Dumfries, 64, 65, 127.
Mure, Col., of Caldwell, 96.
Musselburgh, Dr. Moir of, 96.

Neilson, Rev. Mr., introduction to Dr. Moore of, 43.
Nicol, William, High School, Edinburgh, 41.
Nievison, Janet, Dumfriesshire, 64.
New-licht ministers, 9.

Oswald, Mrs., of Auchincruive, funeral cortege of, 43.
Lampoon on, 44.

Parker, Major, Kilmarnock, 15.
Parkes, Joseph, 60.
Peebles, Rev. William, minister of Newton-upon-Ayr ("Water-fit"), 19.
Peterkin, Alexander, publisher, 78.

Ramage, Dr. C. J., 59, 60.
Ramsay, John, of Ochtertyre, 49.
Riddell, Mrs. Walter, 65, 70.
Robertson, Rev. Dr., Edinburgh, 22.
Roscoe, Mr. William, Liverpool, friend of Dr. Currie, 70, 78-80.

Samson, Thomas, Kilmarnock, 15.
Shakspere, medicine in, 10, 13.
Sidmouth, death of Currie at, 74.
Sillar, David ("a brither poet"), 20.
Sime, Dr. David, Innellan and London, on the Poet *versus* the Man, 118-120.
Smith, Jane, the witty Miss, one of the six Mauchline belles, married to Dr. Candlish, 20.
Smollett, friend of Dr. Moore, 35.
Staig, Miss Jessie, Dumfries, cure of, by Dr. Maxwell, 55, 56.
Stenhouse, Dr. William, Dunedin, N.Z., and London, 122, 123.
Steven, Rev. James, "The Calf," 18.
Stewart, Prof. Dugald, Edinburgh, 18, 25, 70, 84.
Strachan, James, surgeon, Blackford, 115.
Subscribers (medical), list of, to first Edinburgh edition, 32-34.
Subscribers (medical), list of, to Currie's first edition, 89, 90.
Syme, John, Ryedale, 53, 54, 56, 65, 70, 73, 80-82.

Taylor, Dr. John, Paisley, 40.
Tennyson, 79, 114.
Thomson, Mrs. (Jessie Lewers), 60, 114.
Thomson, Dr. John, vindication of B.'s character by, 59-64.
Thomson, George, Edinburgh, 73, 85, 92.
Thornton, Dr. Robert, John, botany and Burns by, 91, 92.
Tytler, Alexander Frazer, Edinburgh, 22, 25.

Vaughan, Dr. Henry, 114.

Walker, Dr. Alexander M., Tunbridge Wells, on the Man and the Poet, 101, 102.
Walker, Prof. Josiah, 15, 16.
Wallace, William (editor, Chambers *Burns*), censure of Currie by, 86.
Watt, Dr. Robert, 66.
Wilson, Professor (Christopher North), 96.
Whitefoord, Sir John, 19.
Wolfe, Dr. Theodore F., historiographer of Highland Mary, 132.
Wood, Alexander, surgeon, Edinburgh, 25, 28, 30.
Wordsworth, William, 58, 75.
B., a preacher from the text of his own errors, by, 119.
Defence of B.'s character by, 77-79, 82, 106.

SUBSCRIBERS.

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Fredk. Vasey Adams, F.F.P.S.G., 10 Queen's Crescent, Glasgow, W.

James A. Adams, M.D., 5 Woodside Place, Glasgow.

Alex. Aitken, Church Street, Stranraer.

J. R. Allan, Bintang, Dalkeith Avenue, Dumbreck, Glasgow.

James W. Allan, M.B., 18 India Street, Glasgow.

William Allan, M.P., Scotland House, Sunderland.

James Montgomerie Alston, M.D., L.R.C.S. Edin., Eastbank, Airdrie.

Jas. Wallace Anderson, M.D., 1 Annfield Place, Dennistoun, Glasgow.

Grant Andrew, M.B., F.F.P.S. G., 13 Woodside Terrace, Glasgow.

W. Craibe Angus, 81 Renfield Street, Glasgow.

James Armstrong, M.B., 84 Rodney Street, Liverpool.

Rev. Wm. Arnott, 27 Roslea Drive, Dennistoun, Glasgow.

William F. Baillie, Free Library, Kidderminster.

M. Bain, J.P., C.C., Woodside, Mauchline.

James Moores Ball, M.D., 3509 Franklin Avenue, St. Louis, Mo., U.S.A.

Geo. Granville Bantock, M.D., F.R.C.S. Edin., 12 Granville Place, Portman Square, London, W.

John Barclay, M.D., Seafield House, Banff.

T. C. BARRAS, M.B., C.M., 5 Seton Terrace, Dennistoun, Glasgow.

W. G. BARRAS, M.D., L.S.Sc., Westbourne, Bellahouston, Govan.

JOHN BARRIE, M.D., 2 Haselrigge Road, Clapham, London.

F. FAITHFULL BEGG, M.P. Bartholomew House, London, E.C.

JOHN STOTHART BELL, M.B., C.M., The Green, Lockerbie.

JOSEPH BELL, F.R.C.S. Edin., 2 Melville Crescent, Edinburgh.

ALLAN MORRISON BLACK, 148 Cathcart Street, Kingston, Glasgow.

MALCOLM BLACK, M.D., 5 Canning Place, Glasgow.

GEORGE P. BODDIE, M.B., 147 Bruntsfield Place, Edinburgh.

DAVID BRODIE, M.D., c/o Miss Brodie, Coningsby Place, Alloa.

GEORGE ARBUCKLE BROWN, M.B., C.M., 2 Oswald Place, Whiteinch, Glasgow.

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